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THE MASTER'S ORDER.



THE

ARTIST'S BRIDE;

OR,

THE PAWNBROKER'S HEIR,

BY

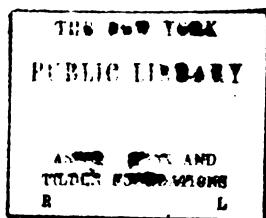
EMERSON BENNETT,

AUTHOR OF

"PRAIRIE FLOWER," "FORGED WILL," "ELLEN NORBURY," "TRAITOR,"
"FEMALE SPY," "BORDER ROVER," "FOREST ROSE," "CLARA
MORELAND," "FAIR REBEL," "BRIDE OF THE WILDER-
NESS," ETC., ETC., ETC.

"A tale of the passions, my lord—
Of love, intrigue, avarice, and crime—
I pray you mark the sequel!"—OLD PLAY.

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TO
SAMUEL C. UPHAM, Esq.,

FORMERLY OF THE
SACRAMENTO TRANSCRIPT,

LATE OF THE
PHILADELPHIA MERCURY,

IN REMEMBRANCE OF MANY A PLEASANT LITERARY DISCUSSION BETWEEN US,

AND MANY A KIND AND CHEERING WORD,

THESE PAGES ARE INSCRIBED,

BY HIS SINCERE FRIEND,

THE AUTHOR:

76413 52852



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THE

ARTIST'S BRIDE.

CHAPTER I.

BEAUTY AND THE JEW.

It was a warm, pleasant evening in the month of June, 1836, that a female figure, plainly attired, emerged from a dark, narrow, noisome alley, into one of the principal, though not fashionable, thoroughfares of Philadelphia. She turned southward with hasty steps, and a moment after the light of a street lamp fell full upon her pale, sad face. And pale was that face, and sad, and anxious, but lovely as an houri's. It was just such a face as we sometimes see delineated by a master artist—sometimes in our dreams—and sometimes, though rarely, in reality—a face of sweetness, sadness, simplicity, and beauty—such a face, in fact, as makes an impression in a moment which time cannot efface, and which ever after, in moments of reflection, haunts us as a something unearthly. It passed, as all things lovely pass, from the light to the shade,

and only the form became visible—a fragile form, hooded and shawled, but with vestments that bore the rude marks of time.

As she hurried forward—this being of beauty and sorrow—she soon passed another street lamp, against whose supporter a gaily dressed young man stood leaning. He started as he saw that face, and narrowly scanned it as it glided through the light, and then turned and looked after the retreating form.

“Beautiful,” he muttered, “and too poor to be above temptation! I will follow her, for I must know more of her.”

At the speed at which he set out, it was evidently his first intention to overtake and address her; but as he drew near her, he seemed to doubt the propriety of accosting one whose general demeanor appeared to indicate that any advances of familiarity from a stranger would be received as an insult and treated accordingly, and so he slackened his pace, and kept a respectable distance behind, determined not to lose sight of a being so lovely till he should have traced her to her present abode.

For a couple of squares the beautiful unknown hastened forward, looking neither to the right nor left, and totally unconscious that an enemy was even then measuring her steps with his own. On the corner of Fourth and South streets she made a slight halt, looked hurriedly around, and then crossing quietly to the opposite side-walk, she turned up westward, and soon made another halt in front of an old structure, which, at the period we are speaking of, occupied a portion of the triangular building plot formed by South street, Fifth street, and Passyunk road. The

structure in question was an old wooden building, of a dingy, gloomy exterior, which has long since given place to one of better material, and more suited to modern taste and improvement. At that time it boasted a sign attractive only to persons in impoverished circumstances, or such as had set the law at defiance by taking their neighbour's goods—viz: the trident, with its three gilded balls, the universal sign of the pawnbroker, or lender of small sums of money, at exorbitant interest, on deposited securities.

Before this gloomy old building, we say, with its darkened windows of stained glass, and its iron trident with gilded balls, and its numerous devices of "money to loan on all kinds of goods," the fair unknown came to another halt, and again looked hurriedly around, but this time with a kind of shrinking timidity, as if she felt a repugnance at entering a place whose threshold was seldom crossed by those who stood well in the world's estimation. But her hesitation was of short duration. She seemed suddenly to remember there was a cause for the act, and a cause for haste, too potent for mere delicacy of feeling; and the next moment, drawing her thin, faded shawl more closely around her, and her hood more forward, to conceal as much as possible her lovely features, she put her hand to the door, opened it nervously, and quickly disappeared within.

The stranger, who had all this time kept her in view, but himself at such a distance as not to attract her notice, now hurried forward, and took up his position by one of the windows, apparently resolved to await her re-appearance.

As her business, however, whatever it is, may detain

her several minutes inside, we will not remain without with one whom we have reason to believe waits there for no good and honest purpose, but enter immediately, and draw nigh the fair unknown, even as her guardian angel.

If the building had a dingy and gloomy exterior, the interior certainly had nothing to boast of in the way of elegance. The apartment you entered from the street was large, and deep, and dimly lighted, and had that sombre air of mystery with which all places of a kindred nature are wont to impress the individual who visits one too seldom to become familiarized with its appearance. A counter ran back from the door, in front of some three or four prison-looking cells, which cells had been constructed for the particular accommodation of such parties as might not wish to be seen, and perhaps recognised, by such other parties as might be here transacting business of a like nature at the same time. Inside of the counter, against the back wall, were rows of shelves extending from the floor to the ceiling, and running far back into the darkness and gloom; and every shelf was literally packed and crammed with bundles of various sizes, all labelled and numbered, and put away with such order and regularity as would enable the owner of the establishment to place his hand upon any one that might be required at a moment's notice. Beneath the counter the same packing and cramming could be discovered, and even the floor was so covered as to leave only a very narrow space for a person to walk up and down. The first impression on the beholder was a kind of mysterious gloom, which very soon merged into the natural wonder if the place could hold any more.

The owner of this establishment seemed to be as much a part of it, as much a fixture in it, as either one of its gloomy cells—that is to say, in just such a place you would look to find just such a being; and it might never occur to you but that he had come into possession in his infancy, that the establishment and himself had had the same parentage, and that he had grown up in it, and had grown old, and withered, and gloomy, and mysterious with it, and really knew nothing beyond it, either of this world or the next. Thin, shriveled, stooped, and aged, with shaking limbs and long, bony fingers, that continually trembled as if clutching the last dollar which might save soul and body—with a long, cadaverous, and wrinkled face—with an aquiline nose and prominent chin, that seemed disposed to meet over dry, bloodless lips—with great, green, cold, goggle eyes, that seemed to see dollars in everything, and nothing but dollars in anything—with white eyebrows, and a few white hairs, the only thing white about him—with a parchment skin, a retreating forehead, and bald head, Isaac Jacobs looked the personification of Avarice about to foreclose a mortgage on Death. His clothes—for he evidently wore clothes—appeared as much a part of him as he of the establishment. What their color was originally, we do not know; and what their color was now, we think would puzzle any artist to say. They might once have been black, or brown, or gray; but they certainly now, like their owner, were of the earth earthy, and seemed to have decayed with him through a long series of years. They hung loosely upon him now, as if he had got into them when in a respectable bodily condition, and had shrunk away

from them since, even as a kernel dries and shrinks away from its shell.

Into one of the before-mentioned gloomy cells our fair unknown hastened, and in due time the man of money stood before her.

"Vell, vat you vash got?" he demanded, in a cracked, tremulous voice, as he stretched forth his skinny hand across the counter.

The fair visitant silently reached forth an old-fashioned gold necklace and gold locket; and as she did so, her lily hand trembled as much as the bony hand which clutched them, but from a very different cause. The pawnbroker, grasping the jewels, shuffled away to a dim light, and made a close examination of the articles. This done, he shuffled back and said:

"How mush you vash wants, eh?"

"Oh, sir! all you can possibly spare on them," replied a low, sweet, tremulous voice. "I am greatly in need, or I would not part with them for any consideration. They belonged to my poor dear mother, who is now in a better world."

The last sentence was uttered in a tone of deep emotion, and a heavy sigh followed it.

"How mush?" again demanded the cold, cracked, unsympathising voice of the money-lender.

"How much will you lend on them?"

"Dat vash not vat I vash ask," said old Jacobs, harshly. "I vash never fixes der price on oder beople's coods."

"Well, I will say ten dollars."

The pawnbroker hastily, and somewhat contemptuously, tossed the jewels upon the counter, and rejoined, with a dry chuckle, as he passed on to another customer in another cell:

"Hopes you vill get so mush ash dat."

It was some minutes before the poor girl could again attract the attention of that withered specimen of humanity—that man of repulsive form and stony heart, who seemed to worship no god but gold. And when she did once more get speech with him, she said, humbly and beseechingly:

"If you think I ask too much, pray tell me what you are willing to do."

"Dree dollarsh," was the cold reply.

"But, sir, consider—this necklace is gold, and is surely worth much more by weight, to say nothing of the locket."

"Vell," was the snappish rejoinder, "I vash not puy dem—I vash only lends monish on dem."

"Oh, yes, sir, I know, and I expect to redeem them; but as they are worth much more, you would be safe to lend more, and it would be such a relief to me in my present need."

"Dree dollarsh," was the only reply.

"Well, take them, for necessity compels," said the fair stranger, in an unsteady voice, as she strove to repress the starting tears. And then she murmured in an under tone: "When this pittance is gone, God only knows what will become of us, unless I can procure other means."

"You vash wants to leaf der name mit dem?" asked the money-lender, as his bony fingers again closed upon the jewels.

"If you please, sir."

"Vell, spheaks it!"

"Villeta Linden."

"Eh! Linden?" exclaimed Isaac Jacobs, quickly,

and with something like a start. "You vash say Linden, eh? Vat Linden?"

"Villeta."

"No, I vash means vat Linden you vash haf for your faders?"

Villeta hesitated, but at length replied:

"My father's Christian name was Eldridge."

"Yesh," returned the Jew, somewhat nervously—"I vash gifs you der dictet shust so ash Eldridge Linden."

"Villeta, if you please," said the young lady—"I will take it in my own name."

"Oh, yesh—I vash forgets: Villeta—yesh—che! che!—I vash forgets." And muttering and chuckling, to cover his confusion, the money-lender shuffled away to his desk, whence he inquired: "You vills haf der dictet for von, two, dree months, eh?"

"Six months, if you please."

In a couple of minutes the pawnbroker returned to Villeta, as we will henceforth term our heroine, and handed her a ticket, and three silver dollars, with the seemingly casual inquiry:

"Vare your fader ish lifs all der times?"

"He is dead, sir, or I might not be here," sighed Villeta.

"Ah! yesh—he ish deads—yesh. How longs he vash die, eh?"

"Some five years."

"Vat vash der matters dat he vash co dead, eh?"

"It is supposed he was murdered," answered Villeta, with a visible shudder.

The Jew shuddered too; and raising his hands, he exclaimed:

"Holy Apraham ! vat a queer worlds ! vat a queer worlds ! Mine Got ! nopody vash knows ven anypody ish safes !"

He turned aside, muttering to himself, and Villeta hastened to quit a place so uncongenial to her refined spirit, and delicate organization.

On leaving the gloomy building and gaining the street, she hurried away, taking no notice of those she met and passed ; and especially did she not perceive the stranger, who had awaited her coming forth and now quietly followed her steps.

CHAPTER II.

THE DYING BROTHER.

IN a small apartment on the second floor of a two story frame dwelling, which fronted upon what we shall denominate Churchyard Court, a young man, in the very prime of life, was gradually passing from time to eternity. We do not say he was dying, in the literal acceptation of the term ; but the seeds of death were in him, and he knew, too sadly and too well, that in a few brief days, or weeks, or months at the farthest, he must pass from his couch to his coffin—from his present homely abode to the narrow house appointed for all living.

The apartment, we have said, was small. It had a couple of windows, looking out upon the before-mentioned court, and upon the churchyard beyond, which was only divided from the latter by a high wall of

masonry. Against the wall of this little room, opposite the windows, stood the bed, on which the sufferer was lying; and near it was a small deal table, covered with a snow white cloth, on which rested several vials, some three or four time-worn books, (the most prominent of which was a Bible,) some clean white paper, some manuscripts, an inkstand and a pen, and a small oil lamp, whose feeble rays barely served to make the darkness visible. There were a couple of chairs, covered with dark cloth embossed with flowers of zephyr, to make them look respectable; and there was a kind of lounge, or settee, manufactured of a box covered with chintz, and placed against the wall which ran from the door to the nearest window. Between the windows stood a common workstand, also covered with a snow-white cloth; and on this was a pitcher of water, and a broken vase filled with flowers, whose sweet odors were diffused throughout the apartment. Above these hung a small mirror; and on the wooden mantel, above an old-fashioned fire-place, were ranged a few shells, and a few other commonplace articles of no particular value. White muslin curtains hung at the open windows, and were gently waved to and fro by a warm, pleasant breeze. There was no carpet on the floor, and little visible in the room besides what we have mentioned. Its general air was great neatness and order, combined with poverty; and a stranger, on entering it, would readily conclude that the presiding genius was a female of taste and refinement who had seen better days.

The young man, who lay upon what must all too soon prove to be his bed of death, we have said was in the very prime of life. He had not seen, and prob-

ably never would see, twenty-five years. His disease was consumption—that fatal malady which sweeps through our land with greater devastation than a plague, and annually takes thousands, and tens of thousands, and hundreds of thousands, of the brightest, noblest, and loveliest from among us. Yes, he was dying of consumption; and his large, bright eyes, and his thin, hollow cheeks, and his clear, transparent skin, with its pearly hue and delicate, rosy tint—all proclaimed that he had reached that stage where long hovering Hope takes wing, and only folds her pinions on the banks of the flowing river of eternal life.

At the moment chosen to introduce him to the notice of the reader, he was reclining on his bed, propped up with pillows, and gazing languidly at the open windows, through which stole in a soft, summer breeze, to kiss his faded cheek and bring a faint hum of busy life from the great city without. But it brought no joy to him—for poverty was with him, and death was before him, and he knew how hard was the struggle to support life, even while life might remain to be supported.

“It is hard,” he mentally soliloquized, “it is very, very hard, to die thus, so young, and leave my poor, sweet sister alone in the great, unsympathizing world, with no protector, no friend, to look after her happiness, and poverty staring her in the face! Poor, dear sister! What will become of her when I am gone? God only knows! It is this,” his mind added, with the energy of despair—“it is this which makes my bed of death a bed of thorns, and closes my lips when I would say, ‘God’s will be done!’ Oh! that I had

health and strength! Thousands have health and strength who are no better than myself; and why should *I* be singled out to be a victim of the remorseless conqueror of mortality? Oh, God!" he groaned, covering his face with his thin, transparent hands, while large, scalding tears pressed between his bony fingers: "Oh, God! it is too much for me to bear—too much—too much—and I cannot say, 'Thy will be done!'"

His emotions so affected him as to bring on a fit of coughing; and when this passed, it left him so exhausted that he was for some moments unable to raise his hand to his head. And there he lay, crushed in body and mind, with his great, dark, bright eyes fixed upon the windows, through which stole in the breeze that he might never more go forth to feel, and the sounds of busy life that he might never more go forth to hear.

He was lying thus, exhausted in body and agonized in spirit, when a light step was heard upon the creaking stairs which ascended to his apartment. The next moment the door opened softly, and a female figure glided stealthily into the room, and drew near the bed with cautious anxiety.

"You need not fear to disturb me, dear Villeta," said the poor sufferer, in a faint, hollow voice: "I am not asleep."

"How do you feel, dear brother?" inquired Villeta, tenderly.

"As if I would rebel against God and Destiny!" replied the other, bitterly.

"Oh! Lionel, why will you talk thus?" cried Villeta, bursting into tears. "Try and be resigned, dear,

dear brother, to God's holy ordering—try and feel as if it were for the best !”

“Yes,” he answered, with startling energy, “be resigned to die like a dog, and feel it is for the best that you are left alone to starve !”

“Oh ! Lionel—dear Lionel—dear brother—do not talk so !” exclaimed Villeta, throwing her arms around him with the utmost tenderness, pressing her trembling lips to his broad, white forehead, and then softly laying her cheek against his own. “It makes me very wretched, dear brother, to hear you speak in this complaining manner !” she added, in a choked and tremulous voice.

“Well, there, sweet sister—there !” he said, in a soothing tone, as he folded her in his arms : “forgive me for paining you ! I will be guarded hereafter—I will not speak so again.”

“But you must not even *think* so, dear brother !” pursued Villeta ; “because it is very wrong at least, and I fear it is very wicked.”

“Well, I will try, for your sweet sake, not to think so even—though it is on your account I have been led to murmur at the ways of Providence. Oh ! what will become of you, my darling sister, when I am gone ?”

“God will take care of me, Lionel,” was Villeta's trusting answer.

“I wonder if it is true,” he said, thoughtfully, “as the Catholics profess to believe, that departed spirits have the power to return and hover about those they loved on earth ?”

“I do not know,” replied Villeta ; “but it seems a reasonable supposition.”

"Because, if it be true," pursued the other, "you may rest assured I shall be ever near you; and holy angels will come also, to see their sweet sister—for you are an angel, Villeta. But tell me—what success? though I am almost afraid to ask."

"And I am almost afraid to tell you, dear brother," said Villeta, seating herself by his side. "I did not go to the same place as formerly, because I felt ashamed to be seen there again; and I thought that perhaps a stranger might be induced to give me more; but I could only prevail upon him to let me have three dollars."

"God help us!" ejaculated the other; "and is that all you could get for those jewels? Why, Villeta, they were worth ten by weight!"

"I tried to get ten, Lionel," sobbed Villeta; "but I could do no better, and I was compelled to take that or nothing. But they are not sold, dear brother, remember—only loaned as security—and perhaps, ere the time expires, I shall be able to redeem them. You know we had to have the money or starve—and what was I to do?"

"Just what you did, sweet sister!" replied the other, tenderly. "I do not blame you in the least—Heaven forbid! I should have done the same, under the circumstances, I know. I was in hopes you would get more; but we must be prudent, and make a little go far. There, sweet sister, dry your eyes, and let us trust, ere this be gone, we may find other means."

"Oh! talk always thus hopeful, dear brother!" returned the poor girl, with a slight glow of animation overspreading her pale, lovely features. "We

are not without hope, Lionel, except it be for your health; and who knows but you may get well yet? or at least be spared many years to me."

"I know," muttered the sufferer—but Villeta did not hear him.

"We are not without hope, I say," she pursued—"for I have the promise of some sewing next week; and though the price paid for such labor is very trifling, yet I think I can earn enough to meet our expenses; and then who knows but I may sell the manuscript of my story for something?"

"It is so far a beautiful story, dear sister," rejoined Lionel, "and should command a fair price; but in attempting to dispose of it, I fear you will be disappointed. I do not want to discourage you, but only prepare you for the discouragement of others. I know something more of these matters than you. Those who purchase literary articles, buy only of those who have fame—they look to the name of the author rather than the production—and you, my poor sister, have neither name nor fame to sell."

"Well, I will try, for I can do no worse than fail," replied Villeta, somewhat cheerfully. "And now, brother, we will have some tea and toast—for you must be faint for something to eat, and I am not without appetite. And here," she added, taking up some articles she had placed on the table when she first entered, "I had forgot—here is a nice orange I bought for you."

"In our circumstances that was extravagant, Villeta," said the brother, as he reached out his thin hand for the delicious fruit.

"I could not help it," she replied. "I knew you

were so fond of oranges ; and this one looked so tempting, that I should have purchased it, had I even known the expense would deprive me of my evening meal."

"God bless you, sweet sister ! You are always thinking of me, and never of yourself," replied the brother, with tearful eyes. "It will never be in my power to reward you ; but you will get your reward, or there is no law of equity in God's economy."

After a pause, during which Villeta removed the articles from the table, to prepare it for the evening meal, Lionel inquired :

"How long, at our present rate of living, will our money hold out ?"

"What with rent, food, and medicines for you, it cannot last over two weeks," she replied, with a sinking heart.

"And should you succeed in earning nothing meantime, what then ?" inquired the brother, anxiously.

The question so affected Villeta, that, without trusting herself to reply, she turned aside to the window, and, sinking heavily upon the lounge, leaned over the casement, feeling the want of air. As she did so, her eyes, from her position, naturally rested upon the ground below ; and the moment they became so accustomed to the darkness as to enable her to distinguish objects at a short distance, she slightly started with surprise, to perceive the dark figure of a man standing close under the churchyard wall, in deep shadow, directly in front of her, and apparently directing his whole attention to herself. She therefore drew back somewhat hastily, and was about to let the curtain fall, when she was more surprised still, to

see him step forward, and hear herself addressed in a not unmusical voice.

"Pardon me, madam," he said, in a bland tone, and with an air of great respect, "for taking the liberty to inquire if you happen to know of any lady who would like a profitable engagement at fine sewing?"

"I should have no objections to engage myself at such work, sir, providing I could suit the party requiring it done," replied Villeta, trembling with hope.

"The very person I am seeking then," rejoined the stranger, taking a step forward toward the outer door.

"Can I have a few minutes' conversation with you?"

"Certainly, sir! Wait one moment and I will light you up."

She bounded joyously from the window—for it was joy to her, in her present circumstances, to be relieved from despair; and as she caught up the lamp, and hurriedly picked up the wick, she exclaimed, with trembling eagerness:

"Now, brother, you are answered; and I trust I am not wrong in adding, by Providence itself—for your question sent me to the window in despair, and lo! I find one ready to give what we are so eager to get."

As she spoke, the light flashed up, as her active fingers raised the wick, and shone full upon her lovely countenance—no longer pale and sad, as when we first beheld it—but brightly animated, and glowing with reawakened hope and joy—presenting a picture which we must pause for a moment to contemplate.

The features of Villeta Linden were at all times beautiful, at all times lovely; but at this particular

moment, radiant with happy emotions and anticipations, they were more than beautiful—more than lovely—they were angelic; for as pure a soul as ever found its temporary home in mortal form, was looking through two bright, soft, gazelle-like eyes, and beaming sweetly in every lineament. As she stood with her head bent slightly forward over the lamp, her soft eyes beaming, her fair cheeks glowing, and her beautiful lips wreathing with the half-smile of newly awakened hope—her golden hair, parted on her broad, white forehead, showering down around her neck and face—her slight, airy form in an attitude of exquisite grace—she would have made the fame of any artist who could have done her justice.

With the lamp in her hand, Villeta hastened down the creaking stairs, opened the outer door, and found herself confronted with a young, richly dressed, and rather handsome-looking stranger. She remembered her poverty, and blushed to the temples as she politely bade him enter.

"I am really sorry to put you to any inconvenience!" he said, in a bland, insinuating tone, as with her he ascended the stairs and entered the apartment of the dying brother.

He was the same individual who had been so struck with her beauty on the street, and who had followed her to the money-lender's and back to her humble home.

CHAPTER III.

THE CLUB ROOM.

At a later hour of the same evening which opens our story, two young men sat *vis-a-vis* at a table, playing a popular game of cards. Both were richly and fashionably dressed; and from their manner—a certain air of languid, indolent assumption—it was plainly evident that both laid claim to the distinction of belonging to the aristocracy of the Quaker City—which simply means that their fathers had acquired wealth for them to squander in baneful dissipation—but whether said wealth had been *honestly* obtained or not, perhaps we had better not stop to inquire.

The room was spacious, lofty, gorgeously furnished, and brilliantly lighted by two magnificent chandeliers. The ceiling was frescoed, the walls richly papered with crimson and gold, and the feet sunk into a Turkey carpet of birds and flowers. The furniture was either carved rosewood or marble, and the sofas, ottomans, and chairs were covered with the richest damask. A row of fluted columns divided the apartment; statues stood in niches; costly paintings hung round the walls; lace and damask curtains shaded the windows; and four full length mirrors, in heavily carved gilt frames, and placed at the four points of compass, reflected every object. There were many marble tables, and many seats, and more than a dozen young men, in groups or pairs, engaged in games of chess, back-

gammon, and cards ; and there were waiters in livery, ready for orders ; for it was the grand saloon of a private club of aristocratic young men.

The two individuals to whom we have directed the reader's attention, sat apart from all the rest, and were languidly playing with the most costly French cards. They were gambling too—for your *soi disant* young gentlemen never play without staking a trifle, merely to make the game interesting—said trifle ranging anywhere from five dollars to five hundred. If either plays without money, and loses, such loss becomes a debt of *honor*, which he is bound to pay, or lose caste with the *ton*, even though the debt impoverish himself and governor, (as he sometimes facetiously styles his paternal ancestor,) defrauds his honest creditors, and leaves him not sufficient to pay his funeral expenses, which are not unfrequently next in order.

The young men under consideration were staking their money, each from the pile of gold which lay beside him, and therefore neither was at present contracting a debt of honor. An empty wine bottle stood before them, and two silver cups were filled to the brim with the sparkling juice of the grape.

"Game!" said one. And he quietly drew down a small pile of gold from the centre of the table, turned his points, and raised the silver cup. "Better luck next time, my dear fellow!" he added, nodding to his companion and sipping his wine.

"Deuce take it, Mark," replied the other, carelessly throwing down his cards and leaning back in his stuffed chair with a yawn, "I believe I will not play any more to-night, for I cannot keep my mind on the game. This getting in love plays the deuce with a

fellow, and you have won seven games out of nine. Mark, here is to my new divinity!" he added, suddenly reaching forward, taking up the silver cup, and tossing off its contents.

"With all my heart, Leon—who is she?"

"Why, there it is again—you are always so curious about the details. She is an angel, my dear fellow!"

"To be sure," rejoined the other, setting down his cup. "Waiter, another bottle of champagne! Yes, Leon, all your *new* divinities are angels—for a week—have known them last ten days—yes, 'pon honor!"

"Oh, she is charming, Wellsford!" pursued the other, with just so much enthusiasm as might be becoming to an aristocratic young gentleman. "Such features, Mark—such eyes—such lips—such teeth—such a nose—and such hair—golden as the inside of a bank vault!—and then—heavens! such a form! Ah! deuce take it! I am astonished to think I won two games in nine—I am indeed."

"Is she rich? belong to the *ton*?"

"Why, there it is again—you always *will* be so curious about the details; Mark!"

"Confound your divinities and angels!" cried the other, somewhat testily; "if you do not want to tell anything, why, let it alone!"

"Yes, there it is, my dear fellow—in a pet, as usual. Now you really want to know, I see."

"I care nothing about it, 'pon my honor!"

"Oh, but you do now—I know you do. I will stake ten dollars to five that you want to know."

"Done! there is my money!" tossing a sovereign upon the centre of the table. "Now *prove* that I want to know."

"I say, Mark, let me withdraw my bet, and I will tell you all about her."

"Agreed."

"You consent?"

"Yes."

"This ready acquiescence to my proposition, proves you do want to know, Mark, and so I will pocket the wager," said the other, laughing, and taking up the gold coin.

"But you withdrew the bet, Leon," cried Wellsford.

"Withdrew the money you mean, my dear sir! Confess, now, you owe me one!"

"Confess, you, I have paid you five," rejoined Mark, good humoredly; "and so now, having your fee, like a lawyer, you are bound to make a clean breast of it."

"A thing that lawyers never do," returned the other. "Well, listen! Ah! here comes the wine—we must drink first." Knocking off the top of the bottle, he filled the cups; and handing one to his companion, and lifting the other, he added: "To the charming Villeta!"

We will take this opportunity, while the young men are drinking a toast to poor Villeta, to give the reader some slight idea of their personal appearance, etc. The last speaker was about two-and-twenty years of age, of the medium size, compactly built, straight as an arrow, and with regular, handsome features. His hair was black and glossy, and descended in ringlets; and his dark eyes were full, bright, shrewd, and intellectual. His forehead was high and broad, and his nose just sufficiently aquiline, when considered with

his prominent chin, to give character to his face. His mouth was well formed, the thin lips closing handsomely over a full set of white, regular teeth. The whole countenance, at a casual glance, was rather prepossessing; but a closer inspection discovered an expression about the mouth, and a certain cunning twinkle of the eye, which would lead the wary physiognomist to be cautious how he trusted this man beyond the restraining motives of self-interest. He had abilities of no inferior order, but seldom turned them to a good account. He had large self-esteem, firmness, and combativeness; with small veneration, benevolence, and conscientiousness; and, in consequence, was vain, proud, conceited, energetic, self-willed, and self-possessed; and also cunning, crafty, insincere, and treacherous—incapable of friendship beyond a certain degree—and even more to be dreaded as a friend than an enemy. He had large social qualities, dressed with taste, affected the gentleman of honor, and was generally well liked by his associates, who saw only the best side of him. He had wit, was fond of merry company and a joke, affected honesty, frankness and candor, and, possessing large secretiveness, concealed all he did not wish known, and continually deceived those who knew him best. He had spent two years at Princeton College; but owing to some difficulty with the Faculty, he had been severely reprimanded, and had withdrawn without graduating.

Such was Leon Dupree, the only son of a man, who, a few years before, had become suddenly wealthy, and of whose honesty and fair dealing there were unfavorable reports, though generally regarded with some reverence by the mere money-worshippers.

Mark Wellsford, the present companion of Leon Dupree, was a slight, slenderly-formed, delicate-looking young man, with light, curly hair, blue eyes, and a fair skin. His features were fine, regular, and effeminate, and without any of those marked traits of character so perceptible in the other. He was of that plastic disposition which can readily be moulded to good or evil; but his present associations were not calculated to develop his better qualities, and already he was on the high road of dissipation and debauchery. He was about one year the senior of his companion; and, on arriving at his majority, had come into possession of a fortune, which he had since been rapidly squandering. His father had been dead some four years, and he resided with his widowed mother, who fairly idolized him. He had two sisters respectably married, besides other rich and influential connections, and therefore his society was courted, both by persons of means and those who looked to turn his wealth to their advantage. He had some natural abilities, and had received a good education, but lacked sufficient force of character to render either of much account.

With these brief remarks concerning two individuals who will figure more or less in our story, we pass on, and leave each to fill his destined part in the great drama of life.

"Well, Mark, my dear fellow," resumed Leon Dupree, "you must know I first beheld this beauty on the street, on her way to the residence of her *uncle*."*

* The Pawnbroker is sometimes familiarly and facetiously termed "Uncle," by the initiated in the mysteries of a great city.

"Her uncle!" repeated Mark, who received the term in its literal sense: "well, who is her uncle?"

"Why, there it is again," replied Leon; "you will be so excessively curious, my dear fellow."

"Hang it!" rejoined Mark, petulantly; "I thought you were to give me the whole particulars."

"Concerning my divinity, certainly," laughed Dupree; "but I did not agree to tell you all about her relations."

"Well, tell me this: Is her uncle rich?"

"Ay, rich as a *Jew*," rejoined Leon, laughing heartily.

"Well, that is something," said Mark, straightening up his collar, and affecting an aristocratic air and drawl. "You know I like respectability, Dupree; and you, my dear fellow—pardon me for saying it—have sometimes stooped too low for a gentleman of fashion—you have indeed—'pon honor! We of the *ton*, you know, should not descend below our own circle, even to fall in love. Pray keep this in mind, Leon, and—a—proceed."

"Well," pursued Dupree, making an effort to suppress a burst of laughter, "I saw my beauty on the street, and quietly followed her to her uncle's, as I said, where she remained only a few minutes, and thence returned home, your humble servant keeping her in view till the last fold of her dress disappeared within her own domicile."

"Was she alone?"

"Ay, my lord."

"And afoot?"

"Undoubtedly, your highness."

"Why did not her rich uncle send her home in his

carriage? I am astonished he should allow her to return home afoot and alone! By the way, how does she live—in style?

“Oh, yes, she lives in *style*, certainly. But, Mark, if you interrupt me so often, I shall never get through with my story.”

“Well, well, go on.”

“How I managed to get an invitation to visit her in her own house, is my secret; but I did manage it, and had an agreeable conversation with her, I assure you. She is not only a beautiful lady, but a lady of genius, Mark, and an authoress.”

“Oh! I abominate a *blue*!” sneered Wellsford.

“For good and sufficient reasons,” rejoined the other, ironically: “We are prone to dislike what we cannot comprehend. *I*, however, like to see beauty and intellect united, my dear sir!”

“For good and sufficient reasons,” retorted the other, with an angry flush: “We are prone to like what we do not possess.”

“Ha! ha!” laughed Dupree—“the wine has brightened your wits, Mark.”

“Sorry I cannot return the compliment,” said Mark, rising.

“Why, so you might, if you would only stretch the truth as I have.”

“No *truth* could be stretched far enough to compliment you on that score,” returned Wellsford, angrily.

“Why, there you are again—off at a tangent as usual. Now, Mark, my dear fellow, you cannot remain angry with your best friend, for the trifle of a joke, you know—so pray make a virtue of necessity,

and sit down, like a good fellow as you are, and help me finish this bottle. Excellent wine, Mark—excellent wine—and, what is better, it is drank at your expense—and surely you will not desert your own! Come, come, Wellsford, (filling up the silver cups,) here is to your lady love—the rich, gay, witty, accomplished, refined, eccentric, and beautiful Grace De Vere—a toast which you must drink, or, by my honor, I will report you at head-quarters.”

“I have drank enough,” returned Wellsford, relenting and taking up the cup, “but I cannot refuse a toast to the charming Grace De Vere. Well,” he pursued, as he tossed off the wine and quietly resumed his seat, “what of your blue-stockings?”

“Pah!” rejoined the other, contemptuously—“you have no poetry in you. Blue-stockings indeed! I tell you she is an angel—a divinity!”

“Ye-es,” drawled Mark, who had begun to feel the effects of the wine pretty sensibly. “Well, Dupree, call her what you like—but whatever she is, what of her, eh? What are you going to do with her, eh? Going to marry her, eh?”

“Do I look like a marrying man, Mark?” laughed the other. “Dence take it, but that last toast was one too many for your good sense—your poor wits have gone a wool-gathering.”

“Perhaps,” said Mark, again rising, with a rather unsteady look; “but even then I have the advantage of you.”

“How so?”

“Why, you never had any wits to go anywhere.”

“Ha! ha!” laughed the other; “very good for you—but borrowed.”

"Well, you didn't lend it," hiccoughed Wellsford. "But I say, my boy, what of your angel, eh?"

"I am dead in love."

"So you said before; and as that appears to be about all you intend to say, I am going home," rejoined Mark Wellsford, turning away. "*Au revoir.*"

"Adieu, if you will leave me."

As Wellsford steadied himself across the saloon, and disappeared through the great folding doors, Dupree looked after him, with a smile of contempt, and muttered:

"There he goes, poor fellow, with more money than brains, and more brains than he can make good use of. Now by the time he reaches home, he will need help to get to bed; and he will wake up to-morrow, under the impression that I made him my confident the night before, and that he has forgotten the particulars. I make many confidants, *seemingly*, and of course become a confident of many in return; but no one knows more of Leon Dupree's secrets than Leon Dupree wishes to have known. If any one can keep a secret well for me, I can keep it better for myself. It is proper to have Mark off his guard, and be the recipient of all he has to disclose. He little suspects I am playing a deeper game with him than any described by Hoyle. He hopes to win Grace De Vere—so do I—who will win her, time will show. Meanwhile, I must amuse myself with intrigue—I delight in intrigue—and, for the present, Villeta Linden will serve my purpose. I was a little taken aback with that skeleton of a brother, I must confess, with his large, hollow eyes, and grave-yard look! But no matter—I can endure him—and he will soon be out of

the way ; and Villeta, lovely Villeta, must be mine. Poor, confiding, unsuspecting, she already looks upon me as her friend and benefactor ; and if I do not take advantage of opportunity, I am a fool. I will supply her with employment and money, praise her talents and beauty, excite her vanity and gratitude, and win her love and admiration. Well, this is a great world—a glorious world—and here is to the best fellow in it, Leon Dupree !”

He drank off another cup of wine ; and then, quietly sauntering through the gorgeous apartment, disappeared—a dark spirit going forth into darkness.

CHAPTER IV.

A MYSTERIOUS DOCUMENT.

Isaac Jacobs, the pawnbroker, sat in an old leather-covered, rickety arm-chair, in front of an old-fashioned writing desk. A miserable lamp, having a single wick, and burning thick, rancid oil, threw a faint gleam upon his wrinkled, begrimed, cadaverous face, as, with iron-bowed spectacles on his nose, he leaned forward, holding in his large, bony, trembling hands a written document, which he was eagerly examining. The room—a small apartment on the first floor, divided by a thin board partition from the general business department of his establishment—contained a ragged-looking bed, a large iron trunk, an iron safe, and sundry mysterious boxes and bundles, with any quantity of old clothes, litter, and dir-

ty rags. The hour was late—the different shops of trade, and various places of amusement, were closed—the rumble of wheels over the flinty pavements had ceased—the streets were silent and nearly deserted—and but few persons were stirring in the great city, save watchmen, thieves, and fashionable dissipators.

The paper which the Jew held in his hand, was thick, coarse, yellow, old, and much worn at the folds. It was written in German, and was a kind of family record, beginning with the marriage of Benjamin Jacobs, the father of the money-lender. While the Jew pores over it—his great, green, goggle eyes closely scanning it through his glasses—we will take the opportunity to translate what he reads—together with his mental or oral comments—which comments, being thought or spoken in the German language, may be rendered into better English than he was ever known to utter.

“FAMILY RECORD.

“*Married.*

“*In Nuremburg, Germany, April 16th, 1728,**

“*Benjamin Jacobs to Esther Nathans.*

“*Issue.*

“*Esther, Born May 11th, 1729.*

“*Sarah, “ June 3d, 1731.*

“*Israel, “ March 16th, 1734.*

“*Hagar, “ August 26th, 1736.*

“*Benjamin, “ April 12th, 1739.*

“*Isaac, “ June 23d, 1741.”*

* The dates of this record were according to Jewish time; but, for the greater convenience of the reader, we translate them according to the Christian era.

"Gone—all gone!" muttered the pawnbroker, with something like a sigh; "and I'm the last of my father's race. Well, well, if Father Abraham will be merciful, I may live these fifteen or twenty years yet. Why not? I am only ninety-five—only ninety-five—and feel quite young and strong. Ah! ah! yes indeed—quite young and strong—quite like a youth I feel. Ah! ah! I do think Isaac Jacobs could run quite a race with any of the young men of to-day—any of the young men of to-day—and—che! che! che!—beat them too—yes, beat them at a race. Holy Father, grant me fifteen years—only fifteen years—I want to see fifteen years more of the world—and then I will be ready, quite ready, and will have my house in order. Only fifteen years to ninety-five—and I really feel quite young and strong. It is nothing to Thee, Almighty Ruler, and it is everything to me! Only ninety-five, and I feel quite young and strong."

Thus soliloquized, and chuckled, and prayed the old, stooped, trembling, parchment-skinned money-lender, as he leaned back in his chair, and raised his spectacles, letting his great, hollow eyes stare at the wall before him and the ceiling above him. Then he pulled down his spectacles, and resumed his examination of the paper.

"Only two of our family left descendants," he muttered, at length; "only two left descendants—and the name of Jacobs is not among them. My father's name goes out with me. I never married—no, I never married. I couldn't afford to marry—the Lord knows that—and so my father's name goes out with me. Sarah married, and married well; but she was a woman, and couldn't preserve the name; and

she's dead and gone, and in Father Abraham's bosom—the blessing of a brother be with her in Paradise. Hagar married too—but married a Christian, and forsook the faith of her fathers—the curse of God be on her for it! and a father's, and a mother's, and a sister's, and a brother's curse be on her for it! and a nation's curse be on her for it! and may she roast, and smoke, and burn in the hottest flames of Gehenna forever and ever!”

The Jew gradually raised his voice, as his passions rose, and the final malediction was pronounced loudly and fiercely, and with a visage contorted into an expression so diabolically, maliciously savage, that the veriest fiend of Pandemonium might well have blushed for shame to find himself outdone by one in mortal form.

“She married a Christian,” he continued, “and God's curse be on her for it! and on him who took her to wife, and robbed her of eternal glory! and on all the descendants of the guilty pair, down to the last generation! God's curse, and her father's, and mother's, and sister's, and brother's, be on them all! and God sweep them utterly from the face of the earth! and land them in the lowest, hottest, and most sulphureous flames of Gehenna, to burn among the damned forever and ever!”

He trembled all over, and fairly foamed at the mouth with his hellish rage, as he paused, exhausted, to get breath and strength for another terrible effort.

“And God's curse has been on them,” he pursued at length; “and man's curse has been on them; and I—ha! ha!—even I have been God's instrument to

work his curse and man's ! Let me see ! let me see !" and he fumbled at the paper till he found the point of his search. "Here it is—here it is ! I put it all down here—I have got them all down here ! Oh ! very valuable paper this ! for it keeps me in remembrance—keeps me from forgetting ! Ah ! ah ! they little think Isaac Jacobs knows them all ! and has traced downward all who ever sprang from the loins of Benjamin Jacobs ! and has been ever on the track of the guilty, a righteous avenger of apostasy. It has cost me money—much money—a great deal of money," he groaned ; "but Father Abraham knows it is the only luxury I ever indulged in—and I have lived on dry bread and water for years, and cheated all the hated Christians I could, to make up the loss ; but still it has cost me a great deal of money—good, hard, solid money—that might now be in my strong box, or else out at good, wholesome interest—seventy-five per centum at least. Ah ! it has been very expensive, this revenge of mine—yet it has been very sweet. But if the Lord will only let me live fifteen, or say twenty, years longer, I can fetch it back—yes, I can fetch it back ; and before I die, I will make a will, and my money shall build a synagogue, or go to the children of Israel, who keep the laws of Moses. I'd even make my will now, only for a superstition that when I have made it I shall soon die and not live ; and I want to live fifteen or twenty years—say twenty-five, Holy Father, and I will not ask for another minute. It is not much to Thee, Holy Father, who hast all eternity at Thy disposal, and it is so much to Thy poor, humble servant, Isaac Jacobs. Oh, do, Good Lord, just grant me twenty-five years ! and if I ask for another minute, may I never enter into Paradise !"

While uttering this selfish prayer, much in the manner that he would have made a bargain with a fellow mortal, he turned his wrinkled visage and hollow, goggle eyes upward, clasped his bony hands, and put on a smile—or what he fancied was a smile—but which was really so hideous a twisting-together of parchment skin and muscle, that we cannot conscientiously compare it even to the demoniac grin of the Arch-fiend of the Realm of Darkness, without at the same time begging pardon of his Satanic majesty for doing him injustice.

Turning once more to the paper, he continued.

“Ah! ah!—here it is—here it is! Here they are together, as I hope they’re together in the hottest place.”

We transcribe the passage alluded to by the pawnbroker, as it stood on his family record.

“*Married.*

“*In Bremen, July 1st, 1752.*

“*John Ackland, an accursed English Christian, to Hagar Jacobs, a runaway, apostate Jewess.*

“*This marriage grieved unto death an honest, holy, Hebrew father, who died cursing his false, faithless, dishonored daughter.*

“*Isaac Jacobs, the brother of the apostate and accursed Hagar, was, at the date of the marriage, eleven years old—but he was old enough to swear an oath, by Moses and all the Prophets, that John Ackland, and Hagar his wife, and all their posterity, should be swept from the face of the earth. And Isaac remembered his oath, and rendered it not a vain oath; and on the annual return of the day he swore it, he secretly renewed it, even in the synagogue.*”

“ Ah! ah! did I not remember it?” said Isaac, exultingly; “ did I not remember it? John Ackland went to England, and took Hagar with him. He belonged to England, curse him! and he went home. Ah! ah! how well I remember—though I am ninety-and-five, and some people call me old. No, no—I am not so very old—for I feel quite young and strong; and who knows but I may live these good thirty years. Thirty years? Yes, why not? And even then I should be quite a youth to the patriarchs of old—quite a youth indeed—as I really feel I am; for in truth I am as well, and strong, and hearty as I ever was; and could run quite a race with any of the young men of to-day; and—che! che! che!—beat them, too—beat them for a wager—as I’m the son of my father. Say thirty years, Good Lord—only thirty years—and if ever I ask for another minute, give me my portion with those who keep not the laws of Moses.

“ But let me see—where was I? Ah! yes—I remember—and good cause have I to remember! John Ackland went to England, and took the apostate Hagar with him; and there she bore him two children—two daughters—which should have been two monsters—curse her! When were these born? let me see! let me see!”

He turned to the written document, and read:

“ Issue of Christian John and Apostate Hagar.

“ Mary, Born in Manchester, England, May 30th, 1753.

“ Martha, “ “ Sept. 5th, 1754.

“ Yes—che! che! che!—and, soon after, there

should have been a death in the family!" chuckled the pawnbroker; "and—che! che! che!—so there was—so there was—a fine death! Let me see—here it is!"

"Died.

"In Bremen, July 1st, 1755.

"John Ackland, suddenly, supposed to be of cholera."

"Supposed to be of cholera!" chuckled the Jew. "Ah! ah! we can suppose a great many things. But was it cholera? was it, eh? A great many people have died of cholera within the last four years—and died suddenly—yes, very suddenly—but did John Ackland, who married the apostate Hagar, die of cholera, in Bremen, on the third anniversary of his Christian marriage? *I think not. I was fourteen years old then, and had a good memory, and have it yet, and I think not.*"

He paused, raised his spectacles, and rolled his great, green eyes around the apartment, with a fiendish expression, and added:

"*I know* he didn't die of cholera—but poison—poison—ha! ha!—*poison!* And just as he was going to take the death-leap, I bent over him and whispered:

"*'Accursed Christian! the brother of your false Hagar put poison in your wine. Pray know me! I am but a boy—but I am the deadly foe of all you leave behind; and they shall soon follow you, and seek and find you in the hottest flames of Gehenna!'*

"Ah! ah! how he looked at me! Holy Moses! how he looked at me! I see him yet. But he didn't say anything; he was too far gone for that; I took

good care of that ; and with a groan of agony—mental agony—a foretaste of hell itself—he died—ha ! ha ! —he died—on the third anniversary of his wedding ; and Isaac Jacobs—that's me—che ! che ! che !—was just fourteen years old ; but not a whit more nimble and strong than I am now ; no, not a whit—not a whit—thanks to Father Abraham, who never forgets his children, the children of Israel.

“ Now let me see once more ! ” again referring to the paper. “ Hagar did not long *enjoy* her widowhood ; not long—not very long—not so long as she wanted to, I do believe. She died in two years, I see—and that wasn't long—for I have lived ninety-and-five years, and really think the time quite short. It is very agreeable to live—it is indeed—and I would be very glad, and very thankful, for thirty-five or forty years more, if it so please good Father Abraham—very thankful, as I'm a gentleman.

“ John and Hagar left two children, which I would gladly have sent after them ; but I couldn't manage it without detection ; and then they would have called it murder—the cursed Christians—and put my neck in a halter ; which would have been unpleasant—che ! che ! che !—disagreeable—che ! che ! che !—very disagreeable. Mary and Martha Ackland grew up and married—yes, grew up and married, curse them !—one an Eldridge, and the other a Linden. Yes ! I have them all down here. Oh, very valuable paper this ! it has got them all down in black and white ; and I'll have them all down into the sulphureous flames of Gehenna, if I can only live a few years longer. I've got Sarah's and Hagar's descendants all traced down—and here they are. Very queer the two lines should have

ended in one, and a Christian at that—the line of her I loved, and the line of her I loathed! Ah! ah! it is very queer that faithful Sarah and false Hagar should join issue in the fifth generation, and the product be a detested Christian. But so it is, as the Lord knows; and I must do my duty, and crush out both lines—crush out all—all—*all*—curse them!

“Queer things turn up in this good world—very queer! To think that this girl should come to me with her jewels!—to me—che! che! che!—who put poison in the wine of one of her ancestors, and helped send her father—Ah! ah! Isaac, that’s a story to think about; but it won’t do to tell—oh, no, not at all—che! che! che!—not even in a foreign tongue—oh, no.

“Now,” continued the Jew, taking up the locket and necklace, which lay beside him on the desk, and which Villeta Linden had put in pledge for three dollars, “I wonder if the girl will ever redeem these trinkets? It is like she will—it is quite like she will; and if she does, I have her; for if she redeems them, she’ll be like to wear the locket—for it was no doubt her mother’s—and she’ll be quite like to wear it; and if she does—che! che! che!—I have her; and she’s the last in the two lines: not that there are no more—for I don’t forget the Duprees—oh! no—not I—not Isaac, the money-lender: but she’s the only one who unites the two—and she’s the latest. Good world this—but queer—che! che! che!—very queer!—I know a secret—yes, I know a secret worth knowing: Isaac Jacobs hasn’t lived ninety-and-five years in this queer world for nothing: I can put a deadly poison in the locket, that will kill her if she wears it—kill her in

less than a year—and nobody be the wiser except me. She'll pine to death, in less than a year, from its subtle influence, and nobody be the wiser except me. Ah! ah! I must always except *me*, Isaac Jacobs, in all these little affairs—always except myself. Now let me see where I can put the poison so as to be most safe!"

He opened the locket—from which poor Villeta, before bringing it to him, had removed the miniature likenesses of both father and mother, with some locks of their hair, leaving it apparently empty—and proceeded to examine it with as much care as if he had supposed it to hold secreted from casual observation a diamond of great value. It was a singular-looking locket, quaintly chased, and was, to all appearance, much older than either of the parties whose miniatures it had preserved. As the Jew tried the thickness of the gold with his finger, he soon discovered, what had escaped Villeta's observation, that one side contained a secret apartment; and as no discovery, with his present wicked design in view, could have pleased him better, he eagerly set to work, and soon removed a thin gold partition—when, to his great surprise, a folded paper, closely and neatly packed in the recess, met his eye. To remove this was the work of a moment; and as he unfolded and held it to the light, he perceived it was a marriage certificate, written in fine letters, on very fine vellum.

"So, with Father Abraham's assistance, this may come of use," grinned the Jew; "and if I can't poison her, perhaps I can ruin her—who knows?"

The marriage certificate read thus:

"This is to certify, that on the Seventh day of March, in the year of our Lord One Thousand Eight Hundred and Ten, Eldridge Linden, and Ellen Courtney, were by me united in the bonds of Marriage, according to the Ordinance of God, and the laws of the State of New York."

"Dated, this 7th day of March, A. D. 1810, at New York, N. Y."

"Willis Boardman, D.D."

"Witness."

"John Ellis."

"Sarah Ellis."

"Henry Zeck."

"Yes," muttered the Jew, as he perused and reperused the document so unexpectedly thrown into his possession, "this may be of great value—great value—who knows? I shall take care of this—I shall take care of this. I shall put—"

At this moment there came three distinct, but not very loud, raps on the door of his establishment, startling him, and cutting short his speech and plot.

"Holy Moses! who can that be?" he said, mentally, gathering up his papers and jewels in hasty confusion, and thrusting them, without order or regularity, into a large iron box, which stood open near him, but which he closed and locked with trembling hands. "Who can that be knocking at this late hour? My God! if it should be an officer come to arrest me, and take me to prison! Ah! ah!—oh, dear me! Good Lord, please don't let them take away Thy poor, feeble, decrepit old servant, who has one foot already in the grave, and can't live but a very little while—perhaps

only a few days, or weeks at the most! Oh, pray don't let them trouble me now! and I'll make my will right off—I swear I will—and every cent of my hard earnings shall go to enrich the synagogues and children of Israel."

Here the knocking was repeated, somewhat louder.

"Father Abraham!" cried the guilty Isaac, dropping upon his knees and clasping his skinny hands—"please do show me mercy this time—just this time—this once—pray do now! Thou knowest, oh, Holy Father, that what I did was done for the good of Thy cause; and if I murdered anybody, or took money from anybody, it was for the good of Thy cause—for they had forsaken the faith of their fathers, and deserved to die; and it seemed right to me to put them out of the way, and not let them cumber the earth. Oh, Holy Father, Thou knowest this, and I humbly beg Thou wilt protect thy decrepit old servant! and I will get ready to die any time Thou mayest call me; and I will leave all my property for Thy benefit and glory: I will indeed, as I'm a gentleman—I mean as I'm a poor, decrepit old fool in Thy holy sight!"

Here the knocking was renewed, even louder than before; and a hoarse, rough voice said:

"Isaac Jacobs, ahoy! I want a word with you!"

"Vho you vash?" inquired Isaac, somewhat reassured, and speaking in broken English—for the foregoing mental and oral soliloquy, as we observed at the commencement thereof, being thought or spoken in German, the native language of the Jew, (if we except the Hebrew,) had of necessity to be rendered into better English than he could speak himself. "Vho you vash, ash vants to preaks into mine housh all der times?"

"It's me, old shipmate—Jack Guthrie!" replied the voice, in a low, guarded tone. "I want a word with you, if you please—I've so'thing to tell you—so heave ahead."

On hearing the name of his visitor, the guilty money-lender trembled from head to foot, and turned as pale as it was possible for one of his dingy, dirty complexion to turn.

"You vash go vay—go vay!" cried Isaac, hastily: "vat for you vash comes here? I vash not knows you more ash nobody."

"Don't you?" returned the voice. "Well, if you'll let me come aboard, I'll freshen your memory, by——! and if you don't let me, you'll wish you had, afore this time to-morrow night—you will, by——!"

"Holy Moshes! vat vills I do? Holy Apraham! vat vills I do?" groaned the Jew, greatly alarmed.

"Come, old lubber," said the voice, "it's the last call: going to do it or not?"

"Oh, yesh, I vill lets you in: sthop von bit; I vill lets you in, Mishter Guthrie: yesh, I vill lets you in."

As he spoke, he looked hurriedly about the apartment, to see if there was anything to tempt the cupidity of one who might not scruple to take advantage of opportunity; and then thrusting his key into an old bundle of rags—or what, at least, looked like a bundle of rags—he caught up the lamp, and hastened into a dark, narrow entry, which adjoined his sleeping apartment, and, with trembling hands, hands trembling with age and fright, began to undo the fastenings of a door that opened into a small, narrow, filthy yard.

From this entry, an old, miserable flight of stairs led to an apartment above; and as the old pawnbroker fumbled at the fastenings of the door, the old stairs slightly creaked with an ascending footstep; but the Jew did not hear the creak, and little dreamed that he had been watched, for the last hour, by a German girl in his employ, the only tenant of the house besides himself.

The door, which was strongly bolted, was at length opened; and then, as a short, stout, rough-looking individual glided in, the Jew reclosed and bolted it with trembling hands, and also with a sinking, quailing heart.

CHAPTER V.

AN UNPLEASANT CUSTOMER.

"OH! I vash so mush delight for to see you, Mish-ter Guthrie—so very mush delight ash never vash!" said the money-lender, the moment he had closed the door. "Ah! ah! I ish very mush delight, ash I tells you. How you vash, eh?"

"Well, I'm so-so," replied Jack Guthrie; "and right glad to hear you're so delighted to meet an old shipmate, even though the time of night aint the most seasonable. How do you do yourself, Isaac? I was afraid your old hull had sprung a leak, and you'd gone down to your master, the d—l; but you haint, I see; and what's better, you're looking just as sound and clean-rigged as ever—ha! ha! ha!"

"Hush! cood Mishter Guthrie—hush!" returned the pawnbroker, putting his long, skinny finger under his hawk-bill nose, to his dry, ash-colored lips. "Dere ish von Cherman gal vot shleeps up stair, and you will vakes her if you vash shpeaks so loud. Here you vash comes in, cood Mishter Guthrie;" and Isaac, with the dim lamp in his hand, led the way into the small room where he had sat plotting against the life of Vileta Linden at the moment of his visitor's unexpected, and, we hardly need add, unwelcome arrival. "You vash sits down," continued the Jew, pointing his visitor to his own rickety arm-chair, as he placed the lamp on the writing desk, and turned to bolt the door; "you vash sits down, cood Mishter Guthrie, and makes yourself so very mush comfortable. Oh! I ish so mush delight to see you, ash I vash not shpeaks dem—so helps me!"

"Well, it's refreshing to find your old hull afloat, and hear you pipe so like a true comrade," said Jack Guthrie, as he took off his tarpaulin, slapped it down on the desk, and deposited himself in the chair. "No use standing on ceremony aboard your craft," he added, with a grin; "and so I'll make no bones 'bout taking the post of honor, and you can stow yourself where you like, seeing you're the cap'in on your own deck—ha! ha! ha!"

Jack Guthrie was not remarkably visible by the miserable light of the pawnbroker's lamp; but still we must venture some description of his personal appearance, as he stretched out his legs and leaned back in the creaking arm-chair, with the air of one who felt himself at home and in good quarters.

He seemed about forty-five years of age, and, as

we have already said, was short, and stout, and coarsely attired. His costume was rather that of a sailor than a landsman; and consisted merely of a brown, dirty, woollen shirt, with large, falling collar of the same—a pair of coarse, dark trousers, girded around the waist by a leather belt—a pair of thin slippers—and the before-mentioned tarpaulin, which he had placed in front of him on the open desk. His face was large, full, and nearly covered with a black, bushy beard, which he had suffered to grow without trimming; and his skin, where it could be seen, was rough, coarse, and of a reddish brown. His hair was long, black, and matted, and fell carelessly over his low forehead, nearly down to his sharp, black eyes. He had a Roman nose—a large, sensual mouth—and, taken all-in-all, was just such a companion as we would not select to accompany us through a lonely place on a dark night, especially if burdened with a tempting sum of money.

He sat eying the dim light, with an abstracted air and a kind of bravado-look, till the Jew had secured the door and quietly placed his old shrivelled form on the iron trunk which stood near—when he resumed:

“It’s chock up to know I fetched you such a prime freight!” he said, with a grin.

“Eh?” cried the money-lender, brightening up: “you vash fetch me von freights, eh? Vare you vash leaf it?”

“Here, old shipmate!” striking his hand on his broad chest; “here! Didn’t you just say how delighted you was to see me lay along side? though when I first hailed, you did seem inclined to sheer off—but I s’pose that was just to give me a salute.

Now I know you're as tickled to see me as if you'd got a harpoon in your gills—aint you?"

"Vare you vash comes from?" inquired Isaac.

"Well, I've run in from 'most every port, old gaffer. I've been a —— long cruise, seen a good deal of foul weather, and thought I'd put in here for repairs. I knowed if you was afloat, you'd lend a hand to a comrade in distress, and see him well caulked and rigged, and in a good offing, ready for another cruise. You see——Got any 'bacca?"

"No, I never vash use der nasty stuffs," cried the pawnbroker, with a contemptuous shrug.

"If it was *nasty*, you'd be just the lubber as would use it," rejoined Jack, with a coarse laugh. "Well, you see, arter I cut adrift from such good company as you, and the skipper what commanded the Delaware expedition——"

"Hush! Hush!" said the Jew, in alarm. "Mine Got! vat for you vash shpeaks of dat?"

"Look'e here, old lubber, what did I say? Why hang me, but you're as stupid as a Chinese junk! Who can tell from my signals what I mean, 'cept them as has the key? and if you and the bank-skipper has kept your tongues furled, I can swear mine haint been flying; and arter having rid out the first storm, you're in course anchored safe now, and needn't fear a slight swell."

"Put I ish very mush afeard to *dink* of dat affairs, for fear I vash shpeaks it out, and der valls hash der ears," whimpered the pawnbroker.

"Well, let her go by the run then," rejoined the other, with a malicious twinkle of his keen, black eyes; "and I'll haul my wind on another tack. You see, then, arter we'd water-logged that craft, and——"

"Mine Got!" exclaimed the Jew, starting up in terror; "vat for you vill shpeaks of dat all-der times?"

"By ——! you take all the wind out of me, running up along side under such colors!" rejoined Jack, affecting to be much alarmed, but secretly amused at the discomfort of his host. "Death's head and cross-bones!" he continued, with a grin, as he surveyed the old, stooped, shriveled form of the money-lender, who now stood before him with his arms crossed on his breast: "If I didn't know you for a merchantman, hang me, but I'd take you for a pirate, and give you the best shot in the locker!"

"Ah, mine Got!" groaned Isaac; "shpose you vash not shpeaks of dat all der times, cood Mishter Guthrie; it vash all der times makes me feel so mush queer."

"Ay, ay, old shipmate—anything to oblige a comrade, who won't forget his messmates at grog time. There, sit down, and make yourself at home as I do. Well, you see—By-the-by, how many bells?"

"Eh?" queried the pawnbroker.

"What's the time of night?"

"It ish very mush late; and, mine Got! I vill get no shleeps—oh, dear! oh, dear!" groaned Isaac, thus giving his friend a gentle hint that he would be very willing to dispense with his company for the present—and, for that matter, for all time to come.

"But what's the time? you —— old, piratical, worm-eaten land-lubber!" cried the other, showing anger for the first time since entering the establishment of Isaac. "I don't want none of your hints to sheer off—for if I spread sail afore I get in the ballast I come here for, why, hang me, if I don't cast my

grappling-irons afoul of your old rigging, and take you with me! What's the time of night? says Jack Guthrie. D'ye hear?"

"I vash pegs your pardonsh, von, dwo, dree dousand time!" whimpered Isaac, with cringing servility; "put I vash not knows der times—so helps me! I dink it ish very, mush more ash der middle of der nights."

"How much more?"

"May be dwo, dree hoursh."

"Maybe you lie!" rejoined the other. "But it don't matter. I've got time enough to overhaul the log a bit, and get snugly stowed afore daylight, and that's all I care for. Well, you see, you want to know how I've weathered old time since you seed me hull down on a long cruise!"

"I vills not droubles you to tells, cood Mishter Guthrie, if you vash vants not to," said the Jew, uneasily.

"Oh, I don't mind spinning a short yarn, so you don't forgit it in paying off."

"Vat you vash means by pay off?" inquired the money-lender, with a look of despair.

"So'thing agreeable, old gaffer, which you'll run into, by-and-by, without tacking. Well, you see, arter that little job down on the Delaware—Oh, well, hang it! if your old hulk won't stand that are kind of overhauling, just let her float the way she is, with her lee scuppers under, and say honest Jack Guthrie don't care a straw! Yes, you see, arter taking French leave of this here old Quaker town—which ought to be scuttled with 'arthquakes, and sent to Davy Jones' locker—I shipped at New York for a cruise to the

Mediterranean, expecting to give you, old gaffer, and the bank-skipper, a wide berth ever arter, according to the articles of agreement atween us. Well, I sailed out of New York in a beautiful raking clipper—the neatest rigged and fastest little craft for her tonnage you ever laid eyes on; and we had aboard, besides a few kegs of specie, (that wasn't bad ballast, d'ye mind!) a crew of the finest lads as ever walked a plank, cut a throat, or swung at yard-arm; and so one stormy night, being all agreed, we quietly scuttled the skipper, throwed over the two mates, and had it all our own way—honest Jack, d'ye mind, being cock of the walk.

“Now to haul in the slack—for I sees your old bones is beginning to creak and groan, like a —— old Jungfrau in a stiff nor'wester—and all because we was so wicked, and you're such a very pious old saint,—I say, to fetch things to a p'int, you must know we managed to git ourselves in fine trim for the nigger trade; and if we didn't lay in a good ebony stock, and make money fast, then Jack Guthrie's a liar; and I want you to show me the craft that dares run afoul of him and tell him so!”

“Ah! ah! you vash makes der monish, eh?” said the Jew, his great, goggle eyes twinkling with something like pleasure at the bare thought; “you vash makes der monish, eh? Cood boys—cood lads—ah! ah!”

“Yes, Isaac, it 'ud done your old, *honest* heart good, to seed us unload the niggers in a stiff market, and git under way ag'in, with as purty a freight of silver and gold, snug below the hatches, as ever you laid eyes on!”

"Ah! ah!" cried Isaac, rubbing his hands; "dat vash der ding vat vash cood; yesh—ha! ha!—yesh—che! che! che! Cood lads—cood lads—ah! ah! And you ish very mush rich now, cood Mishter Guthrie, eh?"

"Why, you see, to fetch the thing right down to a p'int, old shipmate, we done a mighty fine business for a few years; but gitting so much fair weather in the nigger line, made us careless about squalls; and so, one day, the lads all got on a spree, and while our skylights was darkened, a ——— British sloop-of-war run into us, and made us all prisoners, without a shot. It was a mighty bad overhauling we got, and we fetched up sober in irons, with our clipper, money, and everything we'd earned, all gone prize to our captors. Now I cut adrift from 'em—no matter how—and here I is; and I want you to come down handsome, for old acquaintance sake, so as I can git another fit-out; and if I'm ever laid on my beam ends ag'in, by such cursed sea-sharks as them, then say I'm a land-lubber, and don't know a hawser from a chain cable, or a marline-spike from a ratline."

"Oh, cood Mishter Guthrie, I vash haf no monish," said the pawnbroker, in alarm; "no monish at all. I ish so poor, I vash lifs on dry pread, and coes hungry to mine ped, ash Fader Apraham knows."

"Oh, I know you're poor, old gaffer," said Jack, condolingly.

"Oh, yesh, mine Got! so poor ash never vash."

"And our t'other comrade, the bank-skipper—he hasn't a dollar in his locker, I s'pose?"

"Dupree, you means? oh, he ish very mush rich!" said Isaac; "so rich ash he could puy and sells me forty time."

"He made more out of that are job than either on us, I s'pose?"

"Oh, yesh—he vash get very rich so quick ash dat very nights."

"Glad to hear that—for atween you, you've got to come down handsome—else, shiver my timbers, if I don't water-log both of ye! You're very poor, I know."

"Yesh, cood Mishter Guthrie, you vash tells der truth now—you vash tells der truth now—so helps me!"

"Then allow me to say, old gaffer, that if that's the truth, may my old hull sink to fathomless depths, if I haint al'ays been one of the biggest liars unhung. What's in that iron trunk?"

"Clothes—old clothes—shust old clothes—not a ding else, ash I ish a shentlemans!"

"As you're a what?" cried Jack, suddenly starting up and facing round to the terrified pawnbroker; "as you're a what?"

"I vash pegs your pardons," replied the money-lender, "for say shentlemans, if it vash not pleashe you, cood Mishter Guthrie!"

"Open that box!" said Jack, sternly. "I want some money to-night, and hang me if I don't have it!"

"Mine Got!" cried Isaac, starting up; "I vash tells you——"

"Open that box!" interrupted Jack; "or that other iron machine there! (pointing to the safe,) or, foul my rigging, if I don't make a new sky-light in your foretop!"

"Vell, I vill opens it, and you vills shee, mit your

own eyes, dat all I vash tells you ish der truth—all ish der truth, and no lies," replied the Jew, fumbling about his person, as if for the key. Suddenly he added, as if he had just made a frightful discovery: "Mine Got! Fader Apraham! Holy Moshes! oh, dear! oh, dear! I haf peen rob! I haf peen rob! Mine Got! I haf peen rob! oh, dear! oh, dear! and all mine keys ish gone! oh, dear! oh! oh!"

Jack Guthrie reached out his arm, took hold of the pawnbroker's shoulder, spun him round to the light, and, looking him steadily in the face, said quietly, but sternly:

"You might fool a marine, but hang me if you can an old salt! You're a liar, anyhow, and I'll prove it by your own lips, you — old, dried-up, bone-rattling land-lubber! You just swore you wasn't worth a copper, and now you swear you've been robbed! Come! I want a thousand to begin on; and if you don't want your old craft sunk in deep water, below soundings, you'll shell out, mighty quick!"

"Put I vash haf no keys, cood —"

"Stave her in then!" interrupted Jack: "I must have the money!"

"Preak der pox? Oh, Fader Apraham! you yills fetch all der polishe mit der noishe!"

"Don't care a straw—got to have the money!" returned Jack, carelessly. "There'll be one consolation, old dry-bones—if the land-sharks git me, you'll come too."

"Oh, mine Got! you yills not pe so mush cruel?"

"Yes, that's me, to a p'int."

"Put I vash not haf so mush monish—so helps me!"

Jack put on his tarpaulin, and quietly said :

"Just let me out, Isaac, and hang me if I don't pipe you afore a law-skipper afore you touch your morning's grog!"

Thus threatened, the Jew, after many asseverations that he had no money, at length found his keys, opened his safe, and handed Jack a satisfactory sum; who then left, promising to give him another call at his earliest convenience.

Being at last fairly rid of his unwelcome visitor, the pawnbroker hastened to put out his light and turn into his miserable rag of a bed, where he lay and groaned at his loss for more than an hour, when he fell into a slumber, which was disturbed by a vision of burglars, murderers, sinking ships, and other horrors.

CHAPTER VI.

THE ARTIST AND HIS VISITOR.

ON the second floor of a building which fronted upon the most fashionable thoroughfare of Philadelphia, was the studio of an artist; and thither we will now transport the reader, begging him to understand and bear in mind that an interval of a few days has elapsed since the opening of our story.

It was a bright, warm, pleasant day—the sun was far up toward the zenith—and the single window of the studio looked out upon a gay street, crowded with vehicles and pedestrians. The window was open to

admit the soft air, and the light breeze gently waved a long muslin shade, which descended below the lower casement, and bore on it the letters, to be read from the street :

JULIAN ST. CLOUD,

ARTIST.

The apartment was not large, and could scarcely be termed furnished. Besides a couple of easy arm-chairs, and a table covered with green baize—on which were a few choice books, some writing materials, and a small vase of flowers—it contained nothing to speak of, except such articles as pertain directly to the profession of an artist. There were paints, brushes, a pallet, an easel, prepared canvas, a few picture frames, some half a dozen sketches, none quite finished, and one complete painting of a sweet, beautiful face, with blue eyes and golden hair, looking out as it were from the depths of space, the work of the artist himself.

In one of the chairs, with his right arm resting upon the table, and his head supported by his hand—the soft white fingers half buried in a mass of black, wavy, glossy hair, which swept gracefully down to his very shoulders—sat Julian St. Cloud. His face was pale, sad, thoughtful, but very handsome. The well-turned lips and chin—the straight, chiseled nose—the dark, full, dreamy eyes—and the high, broad, white forehead—presented the externals of classic beauty ; while the soul of intellect, beaming through all, left nothing of mentality wanting. He displayed no beard, and

his features had quite a youthful look—the more so, that he dressed in plain black, which contrasted with his white skin, and wore a broad, falling collar, *a la* Byron, with only a black ribbon around his neck. He appeared to be about twenty years of age, but in reality he was some three or four years older.

He sat for some minutes, without changing his position; and then he gave utterance to a portion of a train of thought which had been, and was still, passing through his mind.

“Yes,” he said, slightly nodding his head, as if keeping time with his thoughts; “yes, it is even so; for this world there is no talent equal to the talent of getting money. Though I rob the widow, cheat the orphan, pawn friendship, and sell my soul, I am still a respectable man, so I be not fool enough to part with the money thus obtained; for what is criminal in the sight of God, is merely clever management in the opinion of mankind. The world sets a value upon a man’s purse, rather than his brain; and honest, virtuous poverty must stand uncovered and shivering in the cold, while gilded vice stalks by in jeweled ermine. But why repine? I would not exchange my talents for gold, even though I be doomed to starve; and so let those who have wealth enjoy their day, unenvied by me. This material world is where man begins to live—the spirit-world is where he lives on—and there, thank God! money has no value, and virtue and intellect are above price.

“Let me see!” he continued, after a pause, drawing forth an old purse, and emptying its contents into his hand. “I have one dollar and seventy-one cents, and my rent will be due to-morrow. I must raise the

balance, or vacate these premises. How shall I do it? What have I to dispose of?"

His large, dreamy eyes slowly wandered around his studio, and finally rested upon the only finished painting it contained—the beautiful face, with blue eyes and golden hair, which looked sweetly and sadly forth from an azure field, surrounded with a misty halo. It was a gem of art; and had it been executed by one known to fame, would have commanded a price that, to the poor artist, would have seemed a fortune.

"Must I sacrifice thee, sweet being?" sighed Julian St. Cloud, as he arose, took up the picture, placed it on his easel, and turned it to the light. "Must I sell thee, sweet friend of my lonely hours! and sell thee for gold, as Judas sold his Master? Yes," he sighed, "there is no alternative; I must go forth and seek a buyer, or go forth myself to-morrow, a houseless wanderer. I know where I can dispose of thee; but, alas! I know for what a pittance. It must be done, though," he concluded, compressing his lips and knitting his brows; "it must be done; and the sooner it is done, the sooner the pang of parting will be over."

Just as he said this, the door opened, and Leon Dupree, with a kind of aristocratic hauteur, entered the apartment. As the artist and his visitor were strangers, there was no nod of recognition; but Julian St. Cloud, with a well-bred air, made a slight inclination of his head, and modestly proffered a seat.

"No," said Leon, glancing around with an air of condescension; "thank you, sir! I have made a slight mistake, I perceive—I intended calling on Serley."

"Four doors above," replied Julian, with a polite bow.

"Fine artist, sir! fine artist, is Serley!" pursued Leon. "He sent me a polite note to call and look at what he considers his *chef d'œuvre*; and having nothing better to do, I thought, as I was passing, I would gratify him."

Julian St. Cloud colored, and bowed, but made no reply.

"Have you seen his last, sir?" inquired Leon, working at the fingers of his soft kid gloves, and settling his cravat, with his chin, in the most approved mode.

"I have not had the pleasure," was Julian's courteous reply.

"I suppose he stands at the head of his profession?" continued Leon, in a patronizing tone.

"Some think so," replied Julian, coloring still more deeply.

"So regarded by connoisseurs, I believe," rejoined Leon, taking a step or two forward, to examine a half finished sketch that stood leaning against the wall near the door. "Yes, I told him, some two or three years ago, that he would rise, if he would only give a little more attention to coloring and detail, and study well the great masters, and I am pleased to find he has done so. You evidently have talent," he continued, with the air of a patronizing critic, "but you have a great many faults to overcome. This picture has some good points, but it wants finish and tone."

"It certainly wants *finish*," replied Julian, rather coldly, "since it is in a very *unfinished* condition."

"Yes, I see. You ought to take it to Serley, and

get his advice and some instruction. I think you would do well under a good preceptor. You have talent, without question ; and, to oblige you, I will mention the matter to Serley."

"I beg your pardon, sir!" returned the young artist, quietly, his dreamy eyes beginning to sparkle with irritation ; "but Mr. Serley is the last artist in the world I would look to for instruction or advice. In my opinion, sir, he has far more fame than merit."

"In *your* opinion, quite likely!" retorted Leon, with something like a sneer, as he faced round to Julian. "Two of a trade, you know, and so forth. But Serley has both fame and merit, and I flatter myself he owes much of his success to me. I may be a partial judge ; but, really, I feel constrained to say, I see nothing here that compares favorably with *any* work of Serley."

"There is only one *finished* picture in the room," said Julian, biting his lips and speaking in a slightly sarcastic tone, though he evidently struggled to suppress all show of temper ; "and that is undoubtedly so *inferior* to anything which may have been produced by the *famous* Mr. Serley, as to be beneath the notice of so *superior* a judge as yourself."

"Ah, pray don't get heated, young man!" returned Leon, coolly and impudently. "If the world does not appreciate your extraordinary merits, perhaps it is not so much the fault of the world as your vanity may have led you to suppose."

"Sir!" said Julian, sharply and haughtily, with flushed features and flashing eyes ; "is it your intention to insult me?"

"Oh, not at all—not at all!" replied Leon, with perfect nonchalance. "I never step out of my way to insult any one without cause; and I trust you have too much good sense to be offended at the truth, however unguardedly spoken. Pray do me the kindness to let me look at what you term your *finished* picture."

"You will find it on the easel," said the young artist, with assumed indifference, as he quietly seated himself by the table and took up a book. .

Leon Dupree walked leisurely to the easel, intending of course to find fault with whatever he might see, and thus further annoy the artist, whom he considered wanting in respect to one of his cloth; but no sooner did his eye fall upon that sweet, sad, lovely face, than he started, and exclaimed:

"Good heavens! what a likeness! Did you paint this, sir?"

"I did," answered Julian, without looking up from his book.

"And when did she sit for it?"

"Who, sir?"

"Vil—I should say—the original," returned Leon.

"It is merely a trifling fancy-sketch," replied Julian, with the same air of assumed indifference, though secretly enjoying his triumph.

"Do you mean to say that no one sat for this?" inquired Leon, quickly.

"I do."

"And you never saw the original?"

"I once saw a face something like it," answered Julian, turning over the leaves of his book, but without raising his eyes from the printed pages.

"Do you know the name of the lady you saw?"

"I do not. Do you?"

"Yes—no—that is" —stammered Leon, growing confused—"What is your price for the painting?"

"I have never put a price on it—I intended it for myself."

"But you will sell it?"

"I do not know whether I will or not," replied Julian St. Cloud, indifferently.

"I must have it, my dear sir!" cried Leon, eagerly.

"Name your price!"

"Oh, it is a poor affair, compared to what Mr. Serley could do," rejoined the artist.

"You are piqued at my remarks," said Leon, apologetically; "but recollect, I had not seen this when I made them. Come! what do you say?"

"I will take two hundred dollars for it," answered Julian, carelessly, affecting to yawn.

"I will take it," said Leon; "here is your money;" and advancing to the table, he drew out his pocket-book and began to unfold a roll of bank-notes.

Julian started, dropped his book, and turned pale. He could hardly credit his senses. Until this moment, he did not suppose his visitor had the remotest intention of making a purchase; and he had named his price in a spirit of banter, simply to revenge himself on the other for his disparaging remarks. He would have gladly taken twenty, fifteen—ay, even ten—dollars for the painting—not because he thought such sum to be an equivalent—but because he was in need, and must have the money. And now he was to get two hundred! And even while he thought of the amount, with a swimming brain—for

to him, poor fellow, it seemed an inexhaustible fortune—the notes were placed in his hand, and his fingers closed nervously upon them. Two hundred dollars! It would keep him in comfortable circumstances for a whole year; and as tears of joy rushed to his eyes, he staggered to his feet, and stammered:

“Sir! I beg your pardon, if I have seemed rude! I did not think you—really, sir—excuse me—I thought you merely intended to vex and annoy me.”

“Ah! well, never mind!” answered Leon; “we were each mistaken in the other. I thought you a poor artist, and you thought me a poor judge. This, however, is a gem, and I am pleased to be the owner of it, and am happy in rewarding merit. You say you painted it from memory?”

“About a year ago, sir, I met a young lady on the street, whose features, to the best of my recollection, were much like those you see there.”

“And you saw her only once?”

“Only once, sir!”

“She must have made a strong impression upon your mind!” continued Leon, fixing his keen, black eyes upon those of the artist, as if to read his very soul.

Julian colored, but answered frankly:

“I was struck with her beauty—her almost unearthly loveliness—I must admit. I am an ardent admirer of beauty, and she was the most beautiful being it has ever been my lot to behold.”

“By-the-by, sir, let us exchange names! Mine is Leon Dupree—there is my card.”

“Mine is Julian St. Cloud, and, I regret to say, I have no card to offer. Fortunately,” he added, with a faint smile, “poverty is not a crime, or I fear I might be looked upon as a great criminal.”

"No matter about the card," returned Leon, pleasantly; "I shall not forget your name. St. Cloud! Yes, I have remarked your name in passing—but am really indebted to a mistake for the pleasure of making your acquaintance. You are very young, Mr. St. Cloud."

"Perhaps I am older than I seem: I am in my twenty-fourth year."

"Quite young to have so much merit as an artist, Mr. St. Cloud," smiled Leon.

"Thank you for the compliment, Mr. Dupree."

"You are an American, I think?"

"I was born in the State of New York. My grandfather was a native of France, but came to this country when a young man, and married an American lady; and my father, being only half French, and also marrying an American lady, leaves me but little French blood. I claim to be an American, and proud am I that I was born in the land of liberty—in the land of Washington."

"You are something of an enthusiast, I perceive, in respect to your birth-place," smiled Dupree; "but that, if a fault, is certainly pardonable. I, as well as yourself, have French blood in my veins—my grandfather being also a native of France. Have you studied abroad?"

"No, Mr. Dupree—what little I know, was gained in this country."

"A trip to Florence might improve your talents, sir, which are of no inferior order."

"I am too poor to make the trial," said Julian, frankly, with an ingenuous smile.

"But will not long be so, when once your merits shall have become known."

"Sir ! you are very kind—I should say, you are pleased to flatter me."

"Not at all : I only accord you your deserts. How long have you been in this city ?"

"Some fifteen months."

"And what success have you met with ?"

"I have managed to live, by exercising rigid economy ; but, I am sorry to add, I have done nothing more."

"You are a single man ?"

"I am, and stand alone in the world."

"How so ?"

"All my relatives here are dead ;" and a tear glistened in the eye of the artist.

"Ah, indeed ! I am interested in your history."

"Thank you, sir, for your kindness. Pray be seated ! My history is soon told. My father was a farmer, but by no means wealthy. Four years ago, when the cholera was raging, he fell a victim to its ravages, and my mother did not long survive him. I was at a distant school when the first event took place, and returned home in time to close my beloved mother's eyes. I had no brother, nor sister, and the estate became mine—but it was mortgaged for half its value, and I was obliged to sell it to liquidate the outstanding debts. After all was settled, I found myself the possessor of some two hundred dollars ; and not knowing better what to do, I went to New York city, and engaged as a clerk in a wholesale establishment. But my mind was not on my business ; I found myself continually dwelling upon painting and poetry ; and so I soon left my place, and, with the little means I had, engaged with a professional artist—agreeing to labor

for nothing, board myself, and pay him a certain sum, to give me such instructions as would enable me to set up for myself. I remained with my tutor till I found my means nearly exhausted, and then made a bold venture and came to this city, rented this apartment, and have resided here ever since. This is all, sir, of my past life that can be of any interest to you."

"Of myself," observed Leon, "I may remark, without egotism or vanity, that I am highly connected; my father is quite wealthy; I move in the higher circles; and I think, by a few judicious words, I can put you in a fair way to make a fortune; and I will add, Mr. St. Cloud, I shall take pleasure in doing so."

"Thank you, Mr. Dupree—thank you, from my soul!" said Julian, his heart swelling, and his eyes filling with tears. "I look upon it as a fortunate circumstance—almost as a Providence, sir—that you made a mistake this morning and entered my humble studio; for your appreciation of my humble abilities, and your kind words of encouragement, have brought more joy to my heart than I have known for years."

"Oh, I have done nothing to what I will do!" said Leon, with an air of sincerity and frankness. He mused a moment, and resumed: "May I ask a favor of you?"

"Anything, Mr. Dupree, in my power to grant."

"It has just struck me that I should like to play a joke with some of my friends, with your consent."

"Anything that will not compromise my honor," returned Julian.

"Oh, not that, in the least, Mr. St. Cloud! What I would like is, that, should you chance to see this beau-

tiful painting elsewhere, you will not mention to a soul that it is a work of your own."

"Certainly, if you desire it," replied Julian, coloring, and looking somewhat surprised.

"I want to puzzle some of my friends a little," explained Dupree, with a light laugh.

"The painting is yours," rejoined the artist, "and I will not claim the execution without your consent."

"Thank you, Mr. St. Cloud, and I will make it to your interest to oblige me. By-the-by," he added, as if struck with a new thought—though we, who read his dark mind, may explain, *en passant*, that his real design, through his whole conversation, was now about to be put in operation:—"By-the-by, Mr. St. Cloud, do you think you could paint another face from recollection, with as much accuracy as you have done this?"

"I really do not know," answered Julian, "but I think I could. I have a very retentive memory of the lineaments and expressions of the human countenance—especially if there is anything striking about it, and I happen to observe it closely."

"Well, suppose I bring a lady here—as if by mistake, you understand—for it is no part of my plan to let her get an inkling of my purpose, (and I can mistake your studio for Serley's, as I really did this morning, you perceive)—suppose I bring a lady here, I say, and so manage it that you can have a few minutes' conversation with her—do you think you could paint her likeness, after her departure, in the same style as this?"

"I think I could, Mr. Dupree."

"You are willing to try then?"

"Certainly, sir."

"Well, then, be not surprised if I drop in upon you ere long, with the lady in question; and if you succeed in the work, to my satisfaction, I will pay you the same price for the portrait as for the one I have just purchased."

"Two hundred dollars?" exclaimed Julian, in surprise.

"Ay, more, Mr. St. Cloud, if you think the compensation too little."

"No, indeed, Mr. Dupree—it is a very liberal price for any work I may do."

"But remember—the picture must give entire satisfaction, and I am to be the judge!"

"Certainly, sir! and if I fail to suit, you are not to take it."

"We are agreed then?"

"I will do my best, and I am at your service."

"Enough!" said Leon, rising and proffering his gloved hand; "you will have the original before you ere many days. But," he added, "I must exact a promise of you, that you will never betray my secret—as that would interfere with my purpose—and no one must look upon the painting but myself!"

"I give you my word of honor, sir! and will add, that, should the painting not suit you, I will destroy it."

"Very good, sir! we understand each other!" rejoined Leon, shaking the hand of the artist. "And now I will call upon Serley. But what shall I do with this painting? I do not like to take it with me, in broad day-light."

"Allow me to take it home for you, sir?" said Julian.

Leon Dupree mused a moment, and replied:

"No, I would rather call for it about dark myself. Can I find you here at that time?"

"I will be here, Mr. Dupree, to oblige you."

"Will you be kind enough to cover up the painting, and be at the street door with it as the clock strikes eight?"

"I will, sir."

"Thank you—you will find me punctual. Good morning, sir."

"Good morning, Mr. Dupree."

And as Leon Dupree disappeared from the studio of Julian St. Cloud, the artist turned back to his seat, sunk heavily upon it, and exclaimed, with tearful eyes:

"Thank God, the day is dawning! and the long night of gloom is passing away."

CHAPTER VII.

THE ORIGINAL OF THE PAINTING.

As the great town bell struck the hour of eight, Leon Dupree stopped at the entrance which led up to the studio of Julian St. Cloud. The artist was already at the door, with the painting in his hand.

"You are punctual, Mr. Dupree," he said, as he gave him the picture.

"I always am, sir," returned Leon.

"Shall I not take it home for you?"

"No, I thank you. I will see you again soon on what we were speaking about. Good evening!"

And as Julian responded, Leon walked hastily down Chestnut street to Fourth, down Fourth for several squares, and paused at length in Churchyard Court, before the humble abode of Lionel and Villeta Linden. The outer door stood open; and without disturbing the family who rented the lower part of the dwelling, he passed into a dark entry, and, ascending a flight of stairs, knocked lightly on the door of the only apartment occupied by the sick brother and his lovely sister. Villeta opened the door herself—but stepped back on perceiving her visitor, while the warm blood mounted to her temples.

"Good evening, Miss Linden," said Leon, taking off his hat with an air of great respect and making a polite bow. "I really hope you will not look upon me as an intruder!"

"Oh, certainly not, Mr. Warren," returned Villeta: "You are very welcome, sir! Pray walk in!"

The apartment, as when we first described it to the reader, had an air of great neatness; and Lionel, in a thin calico-wrapper, was seated in a chair, and reclining against the bed, propped up with pillows. The table was before him, covered with its snowy cloth, and supporting the broken vase of fresh flowers, and the few books and writing materials before mentioned, and on the opposite side was the seat from which Villeta had just risen. The half-written page, facing her chair, with several pages of manuscript lying loosely on either side of it, with the pen carelessly laid down and yet wet with the ink—all denoted that Villeta had

been writing at the moment of Dupree's appearance at the door.

"And how do you find yourself this evening, my friend?" said Leon, as he advanced to Lionel and took his hand.

"As well as I may ever expect to be, I thank you," answered Lionel, in his deep, hollow voice.

"Oh, say not so! You must not despair! We shall see you about again, believe me. I had a long talk with Dr. Gregory about you, and he thinks he can effect a cure."

"Oh, does he, indeed?" cried Villeta, with awakened hope, as she proffered a chair to Dupree. "Pray be seated, sir." And with artless grace she took his hat and placed it on the lounge. "Believe me," she continued, "we are very grateful for your kindness; and I have been trying to persuade brother that he is really better since Dr. Gregory left his last prescription—but Lionel inclines to be gloomy and dejected."

"We must cheer him up, Miss Linden," replied Dupree, with a winning smile, "and have him removed to better quarters. And, by-the-by, I know of a place that I think will suit you both. A widow lady, a distant relative of mine, occupies a house in a quiet street; and as she is living alone, I am almost certain that a word from me will induce her to rent you a couple of rooms, with board, at a very reasonable price."

"But we are too poor to make any change for the better," said Lionel, gloomily.

"Not so poor as you think," returned Dupree, glancing at the manuscripts on the table. "I am authorized to make you a reasonable offer, Miss Linden,

for your beautiful story. I advised you, when I was here last, to finish it, before turning your attention to anything else—and I am pleased to see you have been following my suggestion."

"For the reason that I have had nothing better to do," rejoined Villeta, with a flush of hope and pride.

"Well, I told you you should have no work from me till the completion of the story," pursued Leon, smiling; "and I added, that if I could not succeed in disposing of it for you, you should not find you had labored in vain."

"You were very kind, sir, indeed, I know," said Villeta, in a grateful tone.

"I sought to be just," replied Dupree, with an air of frank, honest sincerity. "In the little I persuaded you to let me read on my first visit, I discovered merit of no common order, as I was frank enough to tell you; and when, on my next visit, I perused the whole, as far as you had then written, I determined to take away the work I had brought, in order that you might be induced to finish it sooner than you otherwise would. Almost every one of your sex can use the needle—but very few, permit me to say, possess genius of so high an order as yourself."

"Really, Mr. Warren," said Villeta, with a glowing face, turning away to seat herself on the lounge by the window, "I must utter my solemn protest against such wholesale flattery."

"Well, if you think I flatter," replied Leon, gaily, as he quietly rose and passed over to Villeta, "you will find, ere long, that I stepped not aside from truth to do so. Come, tell me when I can have the story?"

he continued, drawing aside the curtain, as if to look out; "for I have already sold it."

"Indeed!" cried Villeta, looking up in surprise. "Why, how could you sell it, Mr. Warren, before showing it?"

"By describing it to a friend of mine, who is about to issue a new monthly magazine. And so eager is he to secure it," he pursued, taking a seat by her side, "that he has commissioned me to offer you fifty dollars for it, and pay you one half in advance."

"Are you really in earnest, Mr. Warren?" almost gasped Villeta, sinking back on her seat, and nervously grasping the window casement.

"Come hither and see!" answered Dupree—who, as we scarcely need inform the reader, had, for his own purpose, assumed the name of Warren: "Come hither and see, Miss Linden!" he continued, passing over to the table, and placing a small roll of notes upon the half-written page.

Villeta followed him; and as she gazed upon the money, and remembered how like a boon from Heaven it had come in her hour of greatest need, she turned away in silence, and wept tears of joy.

"God bless you for this, sir!" said the brother, in a tone of deep emotion, as he reached out his thin, transparent hand, and clutched the notes with the nervous grasp of a miser. "We shall not starve, sweet sister!" he added, in an excited tone, as he eagerly counted the notes: "no, we shall not starve! we"——

A sudden fit of coughing terminated the sentence, and nearly terminated his life. Villeta flew to his side, and supported his weak frame till the fearful

crisis had passed ; when, with Leon's assistance, she laid him on the bed, completely exhausted, and panting for breath. Then she sat down and fanned him till he fell asleep—which he did in less than half an hour, with the money still tightly grasped in his hand.

"Poor fellow !" she whispered, as she stole softly from his side ; "his emotions of joy were nigh proving fatal to all our hopes. And no wonder ! for our extreme poverty has brought us more than once to contemplate starvation as a thing possible."

"Great Heaven ! are you indeed so reduced ?" returned Dupree, in a tone of sympathy. "Oh, that I had known this before ! But it may not be too late to do something now, if you will be kind enough to receive it in the same spirit in which it is offered. Here !" he continued, producing his pocket-book—"let me beg you to accept this !"

"No, Mr. Warren," replied Villeta, coloring deeply—"we shall do well now, thank God ! The money we have already received, is to us a little fortune ; and though I put aside your noble, generous offer—believe me, sir, I shall never cease to remember your kindness with feelings of boundless gratitude."

Her voice was low, and very tremulous ; and as she ceased speaking, she sunk down on the lounge, by the window, and gave way to tears.

"Really, Miss Linden," said Leon, as he quietly seated himself by her side, "I feel that I have done nothing—and I would do everything for *you* !" The last words were said in a tone of so much meaning, that Villeta instantly looked up, with a startled air ; and perceiving this, Dupree quickly added : "And for your noble brother also."

"And I can only return you the thanks of a grateful heart," replied Villeta, quietly.

But the words were so uttered as to convey a meaning beyond what was spoken, should the listener be disposed to receive them in other than their literal sense: or, to clear them of all ambiguity, they simply implied that the speaker was very grateful—but would be pained to have her gratitude mistaken for a more tender emotion—which was not, and could not be, excited by him who sat beside her.

Leon Dupree was too great an adept in all the peculiar workings of a woman's heart, not to know exactly what was meant; and that his conquest here, should he ever make one, would not be so easy as he had anticipated, from the frank, ingenuous manner of Villeta at their first and second interview—and, in fact, up to the present moment; but though the blood quickened a little in his veins, and a very slight tinge might have been discovered on his cheek, his thin lips quietly curled with a smile of assurance, as he rejoined;

"I ask no return, except to stand well in your regard. But you did not tell me," he pursued, "when I may call for the manuscript of your beautiful story!"

"I hope to be able to finish it to-morrow," answered Villeta, with an air of relief; "it is nearly completed. But really, I fear it will not please your friend when he comes to peruse it. It is almost my first attempt at a continuous story, and a first attempt at anything is seldom successful."

"Very true," smiled Dupree; "but I assure you, you have nothing to fear. I consider myself a pretty good

judge of such matters, and I know my friend's taste. At all events, I take it upon myself to say, you shall have the balance of the money the moment it is completed; and a larger sum, if you think the offer is less than it should be."

"Oh, no, indeed, Mr. Warren—I only fear you have offered more than it is worth."

"Buyers rarely overbid," smiled Dupree; "so let that idea give you no uneasiness. By-the-by, may I inquire if you have as much taste for the fine-arts as for literature?"

"Oh, yes—I am passionately fond of painting and sculpture!" exclaimed Villeta.

"I am delighted to hear you say so—for I have something here on which I wish you to pass judgment," said Dupree.

As he spoke, he took the painting from the other end of the lounge—where he had placed it on his entrance—tore off the wrapper, and brought it, with the light, to Villeta.

"Tell me what you think of it!" he said, as he held it up with one hand, and the light with the other.

"Beautiful! most beautiful! exquisitely beautiful!" cried Villeta, enthusiastically.

"I am glad you like it."

"It is the most perfect gem of art I ever beheld!" said Villeta.

"Because it is the likeness of the most beautiful being on the face of the earth," smiled Leon.

"Is it indeed the likeness of one in mortal form?" inquired Villeta. "She is too beautiful for earth, and should never have been other than an angel."

"It is not only the likeness of a human being—who is an angel, I grant you—but the likeness of one I deeply and devotedly love," said Dupree.

"And may she prove as true as she is beautiful!" returned Villeta, as she rapturously gazed upon that sweet face, with its blue eyes and golden hair, looking out from a field so artistically done as to convey the idea of suspension in the very depths of illimitable space.

"That is my constant prayer!" rejoined Dupree, earnestly.

"May I inquire who painted this?"

"The artist stands before you."

"*You*, Mr. Warren?" exclaimed Villeta, in surprise. "Then, sir, I am happy to say I can return the compliment you were kind enough to pay me, and say you possess genius of a very high order."

"I am an amateur, Miss Linden," said Dupree, with a bow to her eulogium; "but the subject inspired me, and I drew and painted from memory."

"Indeed, sir!"

"Yes! and do you not think the image of the original must have been deeply impressed upon my mind, to enable me to be so accurate in lineament and expression?"

"Of its accuracy I cannot speak—having never seen the original—but of its loveliness and artistic finish I cannot speak too highly," replied Villeta.

"Please to hold the painting for a moment," said Dupree. And as Villeta complied with his request, he turned, unhooked the small mirror which hung between the windows, placed it before her, and said, with a smile: "Look on this picture, and on this!"

"What do you mean?" asked Villeta, quickly, her sweet features flushing crimson.

"Please tell me which is the best mirror in which to behold the lovely countenance of the bright being before me?"

"Mr. Warren—sir—I—" stammered Villeta; and immediately sunk back on the lounge, overwhelmed with confusion, and the painting slid from her hand to the floor.

Leon quietly picked it up, put it on the stand, returned the mirror to its place, and set the light on the table; and then going to the window, he drew aside the curtain, looked out a moment, and observed, in a very ordinary tone:

"It is a delightful evening—the air is very genial."

Villeta did not reply, but remained silent for several minutes, with her face buried in her hands; while Leon, keeping his place at the window, cast furtive glances at her from time to time, but made no further remark of any kind.

At length she roused herself, as by a strong effort, and said, in a tone of some decision:

"Mr. Warren, this must not be!"

"What must not be, Miss Linden?" he inquired, resuming his seat by her side.

"You know to what I allude," replied Villeta, beginning to grow embarrassed.

"If you mean that I presumed too much in putting your beautiful features on canvas, you speak too late, as the deed is already done. The picture can be destroyed, however, if you can find any one with a heart hard enough for the task—but *I* would not harm it for the world!"

"I do not mean that," said Villeta.

"If you mean, then, that I must not love you, you speak too late, for that too is already done. That love, like the picture, however, may be destroyed, if you can find any one base enough to take the life from my heart—but you surely will not expect me to put an end to my own existence?"

"This is a strange subject to be introduced and discussed between us at such a time and place, and under such circumstances, and after so brief an acquaintance," replied Villeta; "and it compels me to say what I would there had been no cause for my saying, as my words may give you pain. You came to me, and found me in deep distress, Mr. Warren; and your kind words, and deeds of kindness—and, not the least, the pecuniary aid you have been pleased this very evening to bestow in the way of compensation for my first literary effort—all have combined to fill my heart with the most grateful feelings; and I would go far, and do much, to serve you in return; but I am certain I can never regard you with warmer feelings than those of friendship and esteem."

"And I shall never cease to love you with my whole soul!" rejoined Leon, passionately.

"It pains me to hear you say so!" said Villeta, sadly.

"Pray answer me a single question, without equivocation!" said Leon, earnestly.

"I will try to do so."

"Do you love another?"

"You are the first that ever spoke to me of love."

"Your answer is evasive, Miss Linden."

Villeta paused, and again became embarrassed. After remaining silent a few moments, she rejoined:

"I will be frank with you—for your kindness to my poor brother and myself deserves it : I never saw but one being that excited an emotion in my breast to which I was a stranger, and I never saw him but once, and never expect to look upon him again."

"Yet you have thought of him daily ever since, and his image is now in your heart?" said Leon, inquiringly.

"That I have remembered him as a something once seen, I will not deny—but if his image remains, it is rather as an ideality than a reality."

"But if you were to see him again, it would return to a reality?"

"I do not know—I never expect to see him again—let us change the subject!" replied Villeta, hastily. "Do you really think there is any chance for my brother's recovery?"

"We will hope for the best. I am no physician—but I will consult Dr. Gregory again, and report to you."

"And did he really speak encouragingly?"

"He did," replied Leon, telling a direct falsehood ; for the physician whom he had employed and sent hither, had really stated to him that Lionel could not survive many months, and might die suddenly, with hemorrhage of the lungs, at any moment ; but it was no part of his design to render Villeta sad and anxious concerning one so dear to her, at the very time when he wished to attract her whole attention to himself.

"I pray God he may be successful ! though I have but little hope," said Villeta, sadly. "I am sure he could not survive many such turns as he had to-night."

She arose as she spoke, went over to the bed, and

stood and gazed upon her sick brother, till tears completely dimmed her eyes. Then returning with a chair, she seated herself by the window, and said :

"He sleeps still, and does not appear to suffer."

"It must be a lonely life you lead here !" observed Leon, in a tone of sympathy.

"It is," sighed Villeta ; " though I think I could bear almost any lot cheerfully, if my dear brother could only have his health once more."

"And how long has he been ill?"

"For more than a year."

"And you have struggled along in your sorrow, battling with poverty?"

"We have only recently been reduced to absolute want," replied Villeta. "We have all along had a few articles to dispose of, at a sacrifice ; but the last one, of any value, was parted with the very night you came to us, Mr. Warren ; and your coming, at the moment you did, seemed like a providential interposition in our favor."

"Would to Heaven I could think it were so indeed !" said Leon. "But have you no friends, Miss Linden ? I mean besides myself—for whatever may be your feelings toward me, I assure you I shall ever be ready to serve you, and will never see you want again."

"You are very, very kind !" returned the poor girl, with a gush of tears ; "and oh ! believe me, Mr. Warren, my heart is full of gratitude, and I will ever daily pray God to bless and prosper you !"

"I can ask no more," rejoined Leon, with a sigh, and speaking in a low, sad tone, "since you have no more to give. I had hoped it might be otherwise," he continued, racking the heart of the fair being be-

fore him with his melancholy cadence ; " but, like many another, I must live on, and bear my sorrow in silence and in secret."

" Oh, sir !" said Villeta—" if I have pained you, forgive me ! and believe me, the very fear that I have done so is painful to me—but it was necessary the words should be spoken."

" I may at least be permitted to live on in the hope that in time they will be recalled !" said Leon.

" You ask if we have friends," pursued Villeta, in a quick, excited tone. " We *had* friends, Mr. Warren, in times past—or at least we thought so—but an unfortunate circumstance, which you will probably remember when I mention it, caused us to withdraw from society, and bury ourselves in seclusion ; and in a very short time—for so goes the world—we found ourselves alone in our sorrow."

Villeta paused, turned aside her sweet face, and for more than a minute her emotions seemed to choke her utterance.

" Pray proceed, Miss Linden !" said Dupree ; " for I am deeply interested in all that concerns you."

" Do you remember"—resumed Villeta, making a strong effort to speak composedly : " Do you remember, Mr. Warren, some five years since, of hearing of the sudden and mysterious disappearance of Eldridge Linden——"

" Cashier of the —— Bank, of this city ?" interrupted Leon, with a start of surprise.

" The same."

" I do indeed remember all that was said of him at the time. I was then at Princeton College, and my father——" He stopped suddenly, changed color,

grew confused, and stammered out: "Yes, indeed—I—I—remember the circumstance—well."

"Then of course you know he was accused of robbing the bank of a large amount? some three or four hundred thousand dollars, I believe," pursued Villeta, in a choking voice.

"Yes, yes—I know!" answered Leon, nervously.

"It was a base, malignant slander!" cried Villeta, somewhat wildly, though smothering her voice, that it might not awaken her brother. "He was one of God's noblemen, and incapable of such an act! and—and—O God! sir—he was—*my father!*"

"You amaze me!" almost gasped Leon, sinking back against the wall, and turning deadly pale.

"As if he, the best of fathers—the best of husbands—the best of citizens—an honest man, and a man of honor—whose soul was virtue's self—could be guilty of such a crime!" sobbed Villeta. "No! he was murdered, Mr. Warren—or drowned in crossing the river—but I do believe, on my soul, he was murdered, sir—and another robbed the bank, and made him the scape-goat of the crime! and some day, in God's own good time, the truth will be made known! and his name will be cleared of dishonor! and the guilty will suffer a terrible retribution!"

As she said this, she fell to weeping and sobbing, as if her heart would break. Leon Dupree, as one half stupified, sat and gazed upon her, for some time, without uttering a word. At length, rousing himself a little, as if he thought it necessary to make some remark, he inquired:

"Why do you think your father was either murdered or drowned, Miss Linden?"

"Because, sir, he never returned to us," answered Villeta, drying her eyes. "We resided in Camden at that time; and he not unfrequently crossed the Delaware late in the evening—being detained in the city here, after bank hours, on business of different kinds. He was seen, that fatal night, to enter a row boat; but no one ever testified to seeing him afterward; and the boatmen—there were two of them—have never been discovered. They were doubtless ruffians in disguise; and probably they murdered him; and, it may be, robbed the bank themselves afterward—thinking the crime would be fixed upon him (as it was) and they escape without suspicion. God forbid, Mr. Warren, that I should suspect any without just cause! for painfully have I known what it is to be under the ban of suspicion through one near and dear to me; but it is not the least remarkable of coincidences, that the teller of the very bank my father was accused of robbing, though known to be far from rich at the time, should, within a year of that terrible event, retire from business, a man of acknowledged wealth."

Leon turned very pale on hearing these words, and his spirit fairly quailed within him—but no one could have suspected his emotions from his voice, which he controlled with an iron will.

"Let me see!" he said, in an ordinary tone: "the teller—what was his name?"

"Basil Dupree!" replied Villeta.

"Oh, yes—I remember now!" said Leon, quietly. And there was good reason why he should remember, for Basil Dupree was his own father. "But," he added, "it is well known he inherited his fortune from a relative who died in France, and that he went to France for it!"

"It was so said, and generally believed, I know," rejoined Villeta; "but still there were some who doubted. Far be it from me, however, to bring so base an accusation against him! If honestly obtained, let him enjoy his wealth; and if not honestly obtained, I know it will prove a greater curse to him, and his posterity, than any I could or would inflict. I have heard, among other things, that he has a son who is a villain at heart, and who has already begun to squander his wealth in the vilest dissipation."

"It is very warm here!" said Leon, rising and passing over to the other window. "I declare," he said, a minute after, looking at his watch, "it is past the hour at which I had promised to meet a friend. Really, how swiftly the time has flown! I am most deeply interested in your sad history, Miss Linden, and sympathize with you from my very soul; but, in justice to others, I must defer hearing more till I see you again. I will call soon for the story, and pay you the remainder. Bid your noble brother good night for me; and permit me to say to you, *au revoir!*"

"Good night, Mr. Warren," said Villeta, lighting him down the stairs; "and again permit me to return my grateful thanks for your kindness to both of us. Ah! you are leaving your painting!"

"Allow it to remain for the present—I wish your brother to see it;" and touching his hat, and making a farewell obeisance, Leon Dupree issued from the humble dwelling into a cooler atmosphere.

CHAPTER VIII.

TWO VILLAINS MEET.

As the great town bell struck the hour of eight—and at the very moment Leon Dupree was receiving his purchased painting from the hands of the artist—the figure of a man, bent with age, and slovenly attired, stopped before a large, splendid mansion in Walnut street. He stopped at the foot of the high marble steps that led up to the main entrance, and with a trembling hand took hold of the iron railing that ran down to the flags and enclosed a beautiful area. He raised his eyes to the lighted windows behind the lower balcony, glanced timidly at the rich lace-curtains which gently waved in the soft, summer breeze, and seemed to hesitate whether to ascend the steps or turn back. He stood a minute thus; and then, as if his resolution had been taken suddenly and he feared it might change, he hobbled quickly up to the door and rang the bell.

“I vash vants to shpeak mit Mishter Dupree,” he said, to a dapper, sandy-haired, pompous-feeling livery servant, who answered his summons.

“Sure, an’ if ye do, Misther Jew, what thin?” was the impudent reply.

“I vash comes to shpeaks mit him, sauce-pox!” replied the Jew, angrily.

“See here, now—if ye be afther calling mesilf names, I’ll pitch ye down the steps, so I will!”

"You vash tells your master dat Isaac Jacobs vash wants to shpeak mit him!" said our old acquaintance, the pawnbroker.

"An' is it you, sure, the likes of him would look at, d'ye think, now? Och! git out wid your blather, now! It's not any of your china, and old clothes, and the likes of thim, me masther wants to buy now—divil a bit!"

"You vash tells him dat Isaac Jacobs ish here, and vash wants to speaks mit him, you sauce-pox! or else, mine Got! I vill tells him so ash he vash preaks every pone in your little tam pody—so helps me!" cried Isaac, straightening up his crooked form and looking perfectly fiendish.

How much longer the altercation might have continued, had the two remained uninterrupted, we will not pretend to say; but just as the Jew ceased speaking, and before the Irish servant had time for another impudent rejoinder, the vestibule door opened suddenly, and the master of the house stood revealed to both.

"What's the matter here, Patrick?" demanded the master, in a quick, sharp tone.

"Sure, sir," replied Patrick, humbly, looking both crestfallen and alarmed—"sure, sir, this ould Jew would be afther seein' yoursilf, sir! and I was tilling him you be engaged, sir!"

"It is von tam lies!" broke in the money-lender: "he vash insults me so much ash—"

"Why, upon my honor," interrupted Dupree, "I do believe I see Mr. Jacobs, my late European correspondent!"

He stepped hastily forward as he spoke—took old

Jacobs by the hand, as if to welcome him—and, at the same time, made a rapid sign, which the latter was not slow to comprehend.

"Yesh, I vash shust comes from der Europes, Mish-ter Dupree, and I vash fetch you mush news," replied Isaac, with a kind of childish chuckle at his own triumph and cordial reception, and at what he considered the great shrewdness of his host.

"Walk in, Mr. Jacobs; I know your news must be important; and as I am anxious to hear it, you will pardon me if I conduct you at once to my library!" said Dupree, blandly. Then turning to the servant—who was standing back, covered with shame and confusion at the idea of having made so gross a blunder, and fairly trembling at the thought of what might result from the displeasure of his master—he added, in a sharp, cutting tone: "Patrick, go below! I will settle with you, shortly, for insulting a friend of mine."

"Sure, sir—" began Patrick, turning deadly pale.

"Go below, I say!" interrupted Dupree, fiercely, stamping his foot. "Death and the devil, sir! how dare you stop to argue with me, sir?"

Patrick disappeared quickly; and merely saying, "This way, Mr. Jacobs," Basil Dupree conducted the money-lender through a long hall, and up a spiral stairway, to a spacious apartment on the second floor, which contained a splendid collection of books, arranged around the walls in heavy mahogany cases. This room, called the library, was lighted, but contained little furniture save two or three tables and some half-a-dozen stuffed arm-chairs. Two windows looked out upon a beautiful side garden, and were open to admit the genial air; but no sooner had Du-

preed entered with his guest, and locked the door, than he hastened to close the windows—though very gently, that no one might hear him. This done, he drew up a couple of chairs, facing each other, directly under a large astral-lamp; and motioning the Jew to take one, he placed himself in the other, and for the first time looked keenly and searchingly into the repulsive face of his guest.

As by this arrangement the light was made to shine clearly upon the features of two dark men—dark in thought and deed—we will embrace the opportunity, before the conversation opens, to describe in some degree the personal appearance of Basil Dupree.

He was a man of some five-and-forty years of age, not above the medium height, but inclined to *embon-point*. His features were not handsome—nor were they decidedly ugly—but the general expression was shrewd, cold, calculating, and sinister—perhaps we should say flinty. His face, cleanly shaved, was full and broad, with a Roman nose, and a large, sensual mouth, the corners of which were drawn down in a manner expressive of decision, energy and boldness. His eyes, of a color between a gray and yellow, were large, full, and set widely apart; and through them seemed to look a soul of iron—or a soul without one genial human feeling—the expression, even when mildest, tending rather to excite aversion than sympathy, and freeze up the warmer nature of the beholder. The forehead was broad, and very full at the base, but not high. It appeared high at a casual glance, because the head was bald to the crown, and the skin had a smooth, oily look; but a short distance above the iron-gray, semicircular eyebrows, it sloped back

very suddenly. The hair, at the sides and back of the head was, scanty, and of an iron-gray hue; and the complexion generally was a shade darker than that of the Anglo-Saxon. We would not be justified, perhaps, in saying there was a resemblance between the master of the house and his guest; and yet, in some indescribable points, there was something in one to remind you of the other; but the Jew was old, wrinkled, withered, and parchment-skinned; while Dupree was in the full vigor of manhood, stout, fresh and hale: both, however, seemed to lack all the better and nobler traits of humanity. There was a great contrast in dress—for Dupree was richly attired, in a suit of black, with a shirt frill of the finest lace, and a snowy cravat neatly tied around his neck; and the money-lender was appareled as we first described him, in a thread-bare suit, which seemed to have grown rusty with age. Of the character of Basil Dupree, the reader has probably already formed a pretty correct opinion; and for the rest, our story, in its progress, will disclose all we wish to make known.

For the space of half a minute, Dupree sat in silence, scanning every lineament of the hideous being before him; and then he said, in a cold, sharp, positive tone:

"Well, Mr. Jacobs, what in the d——l's name brought you here to-night?"

Isaac moved uneasily in his seat—for there was an eye upon him that made him feel unpleasant—and then seeming to muster courage, he replied:

"I vash fetch you news, Mishter Dupree—I vash fetch you news: yesh—oh! dear me—I vash fetch you news, Mishter Dupree—Mader Apraham knows dat."

"Well, speak out!" said that same cold, stern voice, while those same cold, penetrating eyes seemed looking down into the very depths of his dark soul.

The Jew again moved uneasily, and glanced cautiously and searchingly about the apartment.

"You need have no fear of any listener save myself, old man," observed Dupree; "we are alone, and the walls are thick; but speak low, and say the worst in the fewest words!"

The pawnbroker bent forward his villanous face, and said, in a fearful whisper:

"You vash remembers Jack Guthrie, Mishter Dupree?"

"Who?" demanded the host, growing somewhat pale.

"Jack Guthrie!" whispered the other.

"Jack Guthrie!" repeated Dupree, in a low, musing tone. "No! I do not remember the name."

"Bloody Jack!" whispered Isaac again.

"Ah!" cried Dupree, with a start: "yes—I know whom you mean now—what of him?"

"And vash he not comes no times to shpeaks mit you?"

"No—is he alive?"

"I vish he vash so dead ash von carrion!" replied Isaac.

"And is he alive?"

The Jew gave a doleful groan.

"Ah! Fader Apraham knows he ish alive, and pack from der tuyvel, curse him! He vash comes to me, mit der middle of der nights, and makes me gif him so mush monish dat I vash vakes up not vort noting; and den he vash comes agin, and makes me gif mush

more monish, curse him ! and he vash tells me he vill keep on a coming ; and I must shee you and gets den dousand dollarsh—else he vill haf us poth mit ropes round our necks ! Oh, dear ! oh, dear ! Oh, mine Got ! vat a queer vorlds ! Nopody vash knows ven anypody ish safes !”

“ Indeed !” said Dupree, growing a shade more pale, and setting his teeth hard. “ I thought he was paid to go away and never come back.”

“ Holy Fader Apraham knows dat vash der acree-ment dat vash cost me so mush monish dat I vash lif mit dry pread and vater all der times he vash gone ; but yqu never vash gif noting ; and you vash gets so mush monish ash makes you von rich man all der times !”

“ Silence, you old miserly fool !” said Dupree, compressing his lips. “ It was a devilish plot of your own. You wanted the man out of the way for your own purpose : what that purpose was, you know best. I did my part for nothing ; and what I got afterward, I got alone, and took my risk in getting ; and neither you nor Bloody Jack have any claim on it. You hired him—and paid him, I suppose—and both should now be satisfied ; at least you have no right to call on me ; and if either of you attempt to extort money from me, take my word for it, you will find it a bad undertaking !”

“ Oh, dear ! oh, dear ! vat vills I do ? vat vills I do ?” groaned Isaac Jacobs. “ I ish von old man, ash ish vort noting put mine debts, mit two feets in der grave, and villa die pretty soon, 'fore long ; and he vash fix him on to me, and takes every ding, like one tam plood suckers, and leafs me not so mush ash vills puy a pine coffin mitout der paint.”

"Well, the coffin need not trouble you," replied Dupree, his features relaxing into a cold, sardonic smile. "So you live to reach the coffin in a decent manner, you need not concern yourself about the rest."

"Put I vills starve to death pefore I vills die!" groaned Isaac. "Oh, der cood Lord! oh, great, cood Moshes! oh, mine Got! vat for all dish vash comes to mineself?"

"For being an *honest* man, doubtless," smiled the other—that same cold, sardonic smile.

"Put, cood Mishter Dupree," said Isaac, in a pleading tone, "you haf got great deal of monish—and you vills pay dish leecher to go vay and never comes pack?"

"No—not a cent."

"Den he vills hangs us poth!" groaned the pawnbroker; "for I vash hafs no more for to safes mine life."

"In that case," said Dupree, musingly, and speaking in a low, determined tone, "the best plan is to take his."

The Jew's eyes brightened.

"Holy Apraham knows I vash vish him dead, and in Gehenna, to purn mit der rest!" he said, fiercely.

"Then why don't you send him there? I presume you have no religious scruples to overcome!" replied Dupree, his lips curling just sufficiently to show a white line of teeth.

"Put I ish von old man, and veak ash der child—and he ish so strong ash twenty Isaac Jacobses. And den you shee, cood Mishter Dupree, if he vash hangs me, you vash hangs mit me!"

"Would you betray me, you old scoundrel?" rejoined Dupree, in a low, smothered tone, his eyes gleaming with a wicked light.

"Oh, no!" answered the money-lender, raising his hands in holy horror, at the bare thought of such monstrosity; "put Ploody Jack vill!"

"Ah, yes—I see!" said the other: "we are both involved, and must both come to the work. The villain must die, that is certain; but how? and when? and where? What time does he visit you?"

"He vash comes mit der middle of der nights all der times," answered Isaac.

"And when he comes again, could you not shoot him for a burglar?"

"If der pistols vash not co off and kills him dead, den he vash tells all ven der polishe vash comes."

"Well, can you not poison him with wine?"

"Put if he vash say, 'Trink first, mine friend'—and if I vash not trinks, he smells der rat—and if I vash trinks, I co dead mit him."

"Well, I see I shall have to have a hand in the matter—for you are as great a coward as you are a villain!" rejoined Dupree, sneeringly. "Let me see! Ah! I have it! The next time he comes to see you about money, tell him you have been to see me—which is the truth, by-the-by, and I hope it will not choke you on account of its rarity—and say that I will give him the money, if he will promise to go away and never appear in these parts again. Then appoint a certain night for him to come to your place, at a late hour, to get it—and I will be there and take measures to make it his last visit. But you must manage so as not to let him suspect a plot, or we shall have the

d—I to pay ; and you must take care to have sufficient time to notify me, through the post office, by addressing a letter to James Franklin, merely containing the date and hour, without signature ; for if your ugly face is seen here again, people may grow suspicious of my honesty. Do you understand me ?”

“ Oh, yesh—holy Apraham pe praised ! you ish von mans mit der millions !” said the Jew, with a look of admiration.

“ Remember, old man !” pursued the other, sternly—“ you must address a note to James Franklin, containing merely the date and hour appointed for the meeting ; and you must drop this in the post office at least three days in advance of the time. Can you remember this, and make no blunder ?”

“ Mine Got ! yesh—I vash never forgets pusiness !” answered Isaac ; “ I vash never forgets pusiness in mine lifes ; and dish—che ! che ! che !—dish ish cood pusiness !”

“ Stop your chuckling ; it gives me a chill ; it makes my flesh creep !” returned Dupree, with a shudder of disgust, as he drew back his chair. “ Isaac Jacobs, if there is a hell hereafter, rest assured you will find the bottom of it.”

“ Oh, no !” cried the pawnbroker, looking somewhat frightened, and turning somewhat pale : “ Holy Apraham vill takes care of me !”

“ Holy Abraham won’t—nor anything else holy !” rejoined Dupree. “ But no matter—go your way ! I am no moralist—but a man of the world, who prefers to take care of this life, and let the hereafter—if there be any hereafter, which I do not believe—take care of itself. I will assist you in this affair—not

from any love I bear you, understand—but because my own life is in danger. And now, having settled this business, permit me to show you out, with a request that you will never venture to cross my threshold again. I risk my reputation by being seen in your company; and you certainly need not seek to take from me what you could neither keep, nor use, nor sell—for what is a lamb's fleece to a craven wolf?"

He rose, as he ceased speaking, and turned to unlock the door—but the voice of the other arrested him.

"Sthop!" said old Jacobs; "I ish not half done mit mine pusiness. Ah! ah! you ish von very queer mans!" he continued, as Dupree faced round, with a cold, cynical look. "You ish so mush queer as never vash! Ven you vash first comes to me, mit der chewelry you vash steal—"

"Silence!" cried Dupree, springing forward and grasping the arm of the money-lender with a grip like a vice. "You —— old reprobate!" he continued, hissing, in his ear—"if ever you dare to utter such words again, either here or elsewhere, I will cut your heart out, and feed buzzards on your carcass!"

"I vash pegs den dousand pardonsh, if—"

"What is your business further?" interrupted the other, harshly—"speak!"

"I vash vants to shows you how you vash gets great deal of monish!" replied Isaac, humbly; "put ash you likes not for to hear, I vills co pack to mine home and mine ped."

"Go on!" said Dupree, releasing the arm of the Jew, and resuming his seat in front of him.

"No! I vills co pack to mine home dish minute!" said the pawnbroker, obstinately, beginning to straighten up his old bones.

"You will do no such thing!" returned Dupree, pushing him back in the chair with his foot. "If you know any plan for me to make money, I must hear it—for I need all I can get."

"Put it vash von great secrets!" said Isaac, again looking cautiously round, as if he feared there might be a listener concealed in the apartment.

"Go on, you old fool!" cried Dupree, angrily: "did I not tell you we were alone?"

"Yesh, you tells me," replied Isaac; "put der walls vash haf der ears."

"Well, all these walls hear they keep to themselves," sneered Dupree.

"Put dare ish von key-holes!" pursued the cautious pawn broker, pointing to the door; "and oh! mine Got! I vash dink I hears von shtep out dare."

Dupree got up, unlocked the door quickly, and threw it open. Then, after looking around a moment, he closed it, locked it, and returned to his seat.

"Go on!" he said, with a frown: "I would not have your old cowardly heart in my body for a mint of money!"

CHAPTER IX.

PLOTTING AND COUNTER-PLOTTING.

THE Jew fumbled in an inner pocket of his coat, and at length drew forth a letter, which he silently reached toward the other, who almost snatched it from his hands, and eagerly perused it.

"So," he said, when he had finished it, "this seems to be important news. When did you receive this?"

"I vash gets it yesterday," replied the money-lender.

"And why did your correspondent write this to you? what interest have you in the matter?"

"Vell, dat ish mine secrets, ash I vill not tells to nopody."

"Oh, very well," rejoined Dupree—"keep it to yourself then. But is this reliable intelligence?"

"Oh, yesh—you may swears it ish true."

"Your correspondent says, that, by the recent death of one Thomas Ackland, the descendants of John Ackland are supposed to be the only legal heirs to an estate worth some three hundred thousand pounds sterling."

"Shust so, mine friend—shust so!" rejoined Isaac, slowly rubbing his hands: "dat ish vat mine friend vash writes in der letters: yesh—shust so!"

"Well, do you know that this same John Ackland—who, I have heard, died in Germany, a great many years ago—was the grandfather of my wife?"

"Yesh, I vash knows all dat!" said Isaac, with a peculiar grin.

"Heavens!" said Dupree, in surprise—"I never dreamed you knew anything of my family."

"Yesh," chuckled the money-lender, "I vash knows dat you vash runs away mit Lucy Eldridge, vat vash der daughter of Mary Eldridge, vat vash der daughter of John Ackland, vat vash die von time in Bremen."

"Why, who the d——l are you?" cried Dupree, in amazement; "and how came you to know all this?"

"And I vash knows dat John Ackland vash haf anoder daughter, dey vash calls Martha," pursued Isaac, with a grin; "and Martha vash marry von Linden, and vash haf von son ash dey vash calls Eldridge Linden."

"What!" cried Dupree, springing to his feet; "was Eldridge Linden—whom I—whom we—curse it all! you know what I mean—was *he* my wife's cousin?"

"Shust so—shust so!" nodded Isaac.

Dupree turned pale.

"And did you know this when—when—no matter—did you know this five years ago?"

"Yesh! I vash knows it ven dey vash so little dat dey vash not shpeaks at all."

"And why did you want me to do that act?" inquired Dupree, quietly, resuming his seat: "why did you want that man out of the way?"

"Dat ish mine secrets, vat I vash not tells to no-pody!" answered Isaac. "Put ve vill shpeaks of der monish now!"

"Very well—I suppose you have another cursed plot in your head—but go on! I will listen!"

"Vell, if der Lindens vash all pe dead—and dare ish von-lifs, and may pe dwo—dish monish vash all comes to your vifes and childs."

"Indeed!" exclaimed Dupree: "you tell me what I did not know. Since you know so much of my wife's connections, I need make no secret of the fact, that there were such objections to our marriage on the part of her parents and others, that, after that event, we hastened to leave England, and have never since had any correspondence with her relatives. Her father and mother I have heard are both dead; but beyond this I know nothing; and in fact never knew anything of her kinspeople—not even knowing that she had a cousin named Linden. I have stated this frankly; and now I wish to be informed if there are any heirs to this estate save those you have named?"

"Dey ish all—so helps me!" replied Isaac.

"Well, how many of these Lindens are living? and where are they?"

"Vell, dare may pe dwo—and dare may pe von—but I dink dat ish alls."

"Children of Eldridge Linden?" inquired Dupree.

"Shust so, Mishter Dupree—shust so!"

"But the mother?"

"She vash co dead von time."

"And the grandparents?"

"Dey vash co dead all!" grinned Isaac.

"Indeed!" said Dupree, some dark thoughts beginning to play off from his scheming brain. "And where are these children? Did you say there were two?"

"Vell, I vash say dare ish von, and may pe dare ish more ash von—I vash not knows; and vare dey

vash lifs I vash not knows too ; put von gal vash comes to me von times, mit her chewelry, and I vash lend her monish ; and sometime she vills comes again ; and den I vills know more ash now vare she lifs all der times."

"And your plan," said Dupree, quietly, "I suppose is to put them all out of the way?"

"Oh, no—it ish petter ash dat!" replied Isaac, who had no idea of removing the joint heirs of the Ackland estate, so that the wife of Dupree would come into full possession, without any corresponding benefit to him who was now plotting for gain before revenge. "No! it ish petter ash dat—very mush! You vash knows, Mishter Dupree, dat putting beoples out of der vay, vash very mush dangerous to der rope vat vash hangs beoples ; put if you vash broves dem no childs of der faders and der moders, den you shee dey vills not pe der heirs mit der court."

"Ah! I think I understand you!" returned the other: "you mean if these children (if there be two, that is—or, if not, say child) can be proved to be illegitimate, they cannot inherit according to law."

"Shust so! shust so! you vash gets vat I vash means ash von lawyer!" grinned the pawnbroker.

"Well, the next question is—can you prove them to be illegitimate?"

"Vell, shpose I vash shtops dem from brove dey ever vash haf faders and moders?" inquired Isaac.

"Well," said Dupree, smiling at the Jew's blunder, but answering to his meaning, "that would serve our purpose equally as well."

"Den vat you gifs?" cried old Jacobs, with a gleam

of avarice playing over his dingy, cadaverous face, like an ignis-fatuus over a marsh-pond.

"So," smiled Dupree, "that is your game, is it? I thought I should get your drift in time."

"Yesh," answered Isaac; "if I vash fetch so mush monish to you, you vash pays me for mine droubles—dat ish fair pargains!"

"Certainly," returned the other—"that seems no more than fair."

"Oh, yesh—der Lord vash knows it vash so fair ash never vash!" cried Isaac, excitedly.

"But how will you do this?" asked Dupree.

"Shpose I vash gets von marriage certificates, and dey vash gets no oder broofs? and I vash gifs you-dis marriage certificate, eh?"

"But how do you know they have no other proof, even if you have the marriage certificate?"

"Vell, shpose it vash pe so?" returned Isaac.

"Well, what then?"

"Den vat you gifs?"

Dupree mused a moment, and replied:

"I have not had time to think of this matter—nor do I know, only from what you say, that there is any property coming to my wife; but should your statement turn out to be true—and I will take means to ascertain—and should it be in your power to divert the whole into her possession, I will agree to pay you handsomely."

"Vat you gifs?" eagerly demanded the old miser.

"How much do you want?"

"Vell, Fader Apraham knows it vills pe great droubles, and very mush risks!" said Isaac, seriously; "and den I ish so mush poor—and you vills gets so

mush ash you can't owns it alls—dat I vash dink you gifs me fifty dousand dollarsh!"

"Very well," returned Dupree—to the utter amazement and chagrin of old Jacobs, who expected to be beat down in his price, and now felt very angry with himself because he had not asked treble, or at least double, the amount named: "Very well, Mr. Jacobs—if this property amounts to what you say—and my wife gets all, instead of half, through any instrumentality of yours, no matter what—you shall have the fifty thousand dollars, in good, hard, substantial currency! So go to work as soon as you like."

"Put you vill gifs more ash dat?" said the Jew, anxiously.

"More than you ask? Umph! not I. I never gave a man more than he asked in my life."

"Vell," cried Isaac, rising, "I ish von little tam fools! and I vills co right pack to mine home."

"Very well," returned Dupree, "I will show you out with pleasure. As I observed before, you need not trouble yourself to call here again—for a note to James Franklin will bring me to you, and then we can talk over our little affairs in quiet. Take care of your precious life!" he continued, ironically, unlocking the door, and leading the way down stairs; "for you are an old man, and it will go hard with the community when it shall lose so valuable a member."

Isaac did not reply; but on reaching the front steps, he jerked out a short "Cood night!" and then hobbling down to the flags, he shuffled away, without looking back, as fast as age, stimulated by anger, would permit.

When, soon after leaving Dupree, the Jew passed a street-lamp, the light gleamed upon a face more fiendish

than human—for in his black heart Avarice was battling with Revenge—and the terrible struggles of these hellish passions disturbed the external features to a frightful degree. He had been grossly insulted by a man whom, according to his view, he had faithfully served; and he had himself insulted his own shrewdness and sagacity, by asking for his services a sum less than he might possibly have obtained. Had Dupree stood out against his price, and offered him one fourth, or one half, of the amount, he would have felt much better satisfied—for to an avaricious mind, the next punishment to losing all, is that of obtaining its requirement without opposition—because the full sum is regarded as less than might have been realized, and argues a want of worldly shrewdness on the part of the receiver. All vices have their curses; and Isaac Jacobs, being a mere human embodiment of compounded vices, cursed himself all the way home; or rather, perhaps we should say, he cursed all the way home, but divided his imprecations between Dupree and himself.

It will be remembered, that when the Jew first discovered the marriage certificate of Eldridge Linden and Ellen Courtney, he had been struck with the idea that this might possibly be of use to him, in carrying out his nefarious purpose against poor Villeta, whom he hated only for being a descendant of his detested sister Hagar—revenge with him, even down to the last generation of that sister, being a sort of monomania; and it had occurred to him that there might be property descending to the heirs of John Ackland from Thomas Ackland, a wealthy brother who had never married; but he was greatly surprised to receive

the intelligence of that brother's death so soon after getting possession of what might now prove to be a most valuable document—first; in blasting Villeta—and secondly, in putting a large sum into his own coffers. He had received this letter from an English Jew, who had promised to keep him advised of everything connected with the Ackland family in that country; and though he was probably among the first in America who had received this intelligence, yet he reasoned it would not be long ere a public inquiry through the press would be made for the legal descendants of Ackland, and he found himself in something of a quandary as to what he had better do first. At one time he had thought of finding Villeta, and getting her, for a certain sum, to assign to him her right and title to any property to which she might chance to fall heir. But to this plan there were difficulties and objections. First, where was he to find her? for he had neglected to inquire her place of residence on the night she pawned her jewelry, and since her father's death he had lost all trace of her family: secondly, she might have a brother—she had had a brother, he knew—and, if so, she would not be likely to act without consulting him; there would be two to persuade, or purchase, instead of one; and he of course would be likely to suspect something near the truth, and perhaps make troublesome inquiries, not only into this affair, but some others that would not be pleasant to reveal: and thirdly, the whole proceeding would doubtless be illegal when consummated.

On further pondering the matter, another plan had at first seemed feasible—viz: to search for Villeta till found, and then make known to her her probable good

fortune, and ascertain if the marriage could be proved without the certificate ; and, if not, to only yield it to the highest bidder among the parties interested. But this scheme likewise had its objections—for it might readily be proved, through his own showing of the certificate, that there was in existence such a certificate, and this of itself would destroy its value. So at last he had come to the conclusion to see Dupree—both on this matter and on another of a troublesome nature—and the reader, by being present at that interview, is of course acquainted with all its details.

It took old Jacobs about half an hour to reach his miserable-looking abode, which he had closed for the night before leaving ; and going round to the back entrance, he knocked at the rear door ; which was presently opened by a little German girl, of some ten or twelve years of age, whom he kept in his employ—or rather, we should say, whom he worked hard, abused often, and nearly starved from month to month and year to year.

This poor child, in this old den—dirty, ragged, and governed by a harsh, unfeeling, miserly master—was very unfortunately situated : but she had no friends ; and those who might have pitied and relieved her, knew nothing of her. She was a native of Germany ; and some years ago had emigrated to this country, with her widowed mother, and an only brother—both of whom had died suddenly soon after reaching Philadelphia. Alone—a stranger in a strange land, whose language she could not speak—without a relative or friend to care for her—without money, and only the clothes that were on her person—she one day wandered up South street, forlorn and wretched ; and, among

other places, stepped into the shop of Isaac Jacobs, to beg for work, or a small pittance to keep her from starving. The old Jew, being a German by birth, could understand and converse with her; and having cheated somebody just before her entrance, he chanced to be in a pleasant humor; and learning she had no friends, he very magnanimously offered her a home for her services—he being in want of just such a person. She had lived with him nearly four years, and been treated worse than a dog; but she had borne his harsh usage without murmuring, because she had supposed herself to have no choice between her present situation and starvation. Her features, strongly German, were intelligent; but her flaxen hair floated around her face and neck in tangled masses; her face and hands were dirty; her body was literally enveloped in rags; and for years, except when she went out in the snow, her feet had never entered a shoe.

“Has anybody been here, Catharine?” asked the Jew, harshly, as he shuffled in and locked the door.

He spoke in German, which the reader will bear in mind we must render into better English than he could use.

“No, sir,” replied the child, in German also.

“And what did you steal while I was away, you minx?”

“Nothing, sir.”

“I don’t believe you! I know you want to steal; I know you do steal; and just so soon as I catch you, I am going to kill you! D’ye hear that! D’ye hear that!” And without waiting for a reply, he added: “Now clear out to bed! Away with ye! away with ye! and if you’re not up and at your sewing by break of day, I’ll whip your skin off! Clear out!”

"Please, sir," whined the poor girl, "give me a piece of bread! only just a little piece—I'm so hungry."

The Jew had by this time got the door open into his sleeping apartment; and having struck a light—for he had allowed Catharine no light in his absence, it being too expensive—he shuffled up to the poor girl, who stood trembling and waiting for her food, and struck her a dastardly blow, saying:

"Clear out to bed, you fool! there's bread for you, you glutton! clear out to bed! You had bread once to-day, and that's more than you earned."

Catharine slunk away, crying, and ascended an old flight of creaking stairs, to a bundle of rags, which the pawnbroker was wont to dignify by the name of bed. Having seen her off, and sent after her some low muttered curses, the Jew turned into his own apartment, locked the door, counted over his money, and then re-examined the marriage certificate.

While he sat looking at the latter, by the dim light of his lamp, and secretly cursing himself for having offered to dispose of it for a less sum than he might have obtained, the thought suddenly occurred to him, that, by making a copy, he might retain the original; and after getting the promised fifty thousand dollars of Dupree, he would still have it in his power to cheat the scoundrel out of half the estate, or compel him to pay him, Isaac Jacobs, his own price for the genuine document. This idea came with electric force upon the old miser, and he almost jumped from his seat, while his harsh, old features brightened, and his great, green, goggle eyes gleamed with new lustre.

"Ah! ah! ah!—che! che! che!" he chuckled,

leaning back in his chair, and clapping his hands: "I'll have him yet! I'll have him yet! Catch old Isaac Jacobs asleep! Get the better of a man who has seen ninety-and-five years, will he? Beat me at my own game, eh? This will be a glorious triumph! che! che! che!"

He sat, and planned, and chuckled, for some ten minutes longer; and then, remembering it was expensive to do this in the light, he hastened to put away his papers and money, lock his safe, hide his keys, extinguish his lamp, and turn into his old rag of a bed, where, for more than an hour, he lay awake, and thought, and planned, and prayed, and chuckled; and then he fell asleep, to dream he was swimming in an ocean of gold.

CHAPTER X.

ANOTHER SCHEME.

It was in no very enviable state of mind that Leon Dupree took leave of Villeta Linden, as recorded in a previous chapter. We pretend to have had some little experience in the workings of the human heart, and we have yet to learn that any individual has ever felt altogether pleased in hearing himself or herself spoken of in disparaging terms, and more especially by one in whose estimation he or she would stand well. Leon had heard his father and himself mentioned in no very flattering language, by one who professed to esteem him in his assumed character; he had learned,

too, that Villeta was the daughter of one whom he had heard his father, for reasons of his own, speak of as a bank-robber, and a villain of the blackest dye in every respect; he had also found that his conquest of the heart of that daughter was not likely to be an easy one; and without resorting to other, and perhaps compulsory means, his time, labor, and money might be thrown away entirely; and therefore, in summing up the whole matter, he discovered nothing to place to his credit, and in consequence felt no little anger and chagrin.

"Should she discover who I am," he muttered, as he hurried away up Fourth street, "even her gratitude might be turned into detestation, and then all my plans would certainly fail. It is well I gave another name, and concealed my own, or my design might have been thwarted in the outset! By heavens! she is very beautiful! and the more I see of her, the more I am charmed; and were she only wealthy—Pshaw! what am I thinking of? Would I, Leon Dupree, wed the daughter of a bank-robber, even if she were an heiress of untold wealth? What would the world say? Pshaw! Let me think of a better plan! She must be mine, but in another sense. I would have her love, but not her hand. She thinks me a villain, does she? Umph! If I live; she may have cause to repeat her words, and then repent of them; and then it may come my turn to say what I think of her family. There is an old adage, that those who live in glass houses should not throw stones. Well, well—we shall see! we shall see!"

And having uttered this, as one thinking aloud, he fell into a silent train of thought, and became absorbed in a scheme worthy of his own dark mind.

From Fourth street, Leon Dupree soon turned into a smaller and less frequented thoroughfare, which led down toward the river ; and after going a short distance, he stopped before a small, genteel-looking dwelling, ascended a couple of steps, and rang the bell. A lady, about forty years of age—plainly, but richly dressed—of full, fair features, and rather prepossessing appearance—opened the door.

“Good evening, Mrs. Leslie !” said Leon, politely ; “you are the very person I wish to see. Pray favor me with a few minutes’ private conversation !”

“Marie is in the parlor,” she said in reply, after returning his salutation ; “is it necessary that she should retire ?”

“No, for we can pass up to your own room, and not disturb her. She is busy with the piano, I hear ; I have a little matter of business, and I will speak to her when I come down. Pray bring up a bottle of wine, Mrs. Leslie !” he added, as he hurried through the entry, and up a flight of stairs at the other end, as one well acquainted with the house, and who felt he had a right to consider himself at home.

He entered an elegant little boudoir on the second floor, took off his hat, ran his fingers through his curls, and quietly deposited himself in an easy chair. The room was richly carpeted, and furnished with exquisite taste ; and an astral lamp, standing on a dressing-bureau between the windows, threw a soft, mellow light over the whole.

In a couple of minutes Mrs. Leslie joined him, bringing a silver waiter, containing a bottle of wine and a couple of glasses, which she placed upon a small table by his side ; then quietly drawing up a chair on

the opposite side, she seated herself so as to face him, and looked at him inquiringly.

"Now I will wager a dozen bottles of this same good wine," he said, laughing, as he proceeded to fill the glasses, "that you anticipate hearing something of a very serious, startling nature!"

"You appear unusually excited, Mr. Dupree, I must confess!" returned Mrs. Leslie.

"Well, I am not in the most humorous mood, it is true," replied Leon; "but still you have no occasion for any alarm or anxiety. Here is your health, Mrs. Leslie—and may you live a thousand years!"

"I hope not!" rejoined the other, smiling, as she touched glasses with Leon. "Heaven knows we poor women get old and wrinkled enough in a hundred years! and, for my part, I do not wish to outlive my beauty."

She closed with a merry laugh.

"Well, I believe you are right," said Leon, emptying his glass; "for life without its charms would only be a living death. Pray let me correct my error!" he continued, filling his own glass again. "Here is to your beauty, Mrs. Leslie—may it never fade!"

"Oh, you flatterer!" cried the other, merrily; "now I know you have some scheme on hand, and want my assistance!"

"Why do you think so, my dear Mrs. Leslie?"

"Because you are so anxious to put me in a good humor before naming your business."

"Fie on you now, for supposing I cannot be sincere in my admiration of your surpassing loveliness, without having some design to further!" said Leon, gaily. "I come on business, it is true—I told you as

much to begin with—but you know I always have thought you remarkably handsome, even when I have had no favor to ask.”

“Well, well—never mind!” rejoined Mrs. Leslie, with a merry twinkle of her keen, dark eye. “Doubtless you mean all you say, and much more of the same kind; but language, you know, has its limits, and can only express admiration to a certain degree. Pray honor me, sir, with your more weighty considerations.”

“I will, my dear madam,” returned Leon, mechanically filling his glass for the third time. “You must know, then, to begin with, that I am in love.”

This was spoken seriously—but his fair listener burst into a ringing laugh, and it was some moments ere she could control herself to reply.

“Poor fellow!” she said, at length, with a most demure expression: “are you so indeed? and for the hundredth time at that! Ah! what a constitution you have, Mr. Dupree, to be so subject to these attacks! Really now, you ought to find and consult some physician who can minister to a heart diseased! Pray, sir, when were you first seized last? and what headway has your malady? and how is the state of your pulse now!”

“Pshaw!” said Leon, impatiently; “give over this jesting, and be serious!”

“Ah! it is a very serious matter, I know,” sighed the other, with mock gravity; “and you see I am already getting serious over it! Pray, go on!”

“Yes,” resumed Leon, “I am in love, and I want your assistance in a harmless little plot of my own!”

“Go on, sir!”

"You know, my dear madam, you have long been my confidential friend and adviser," proceeded the wily young man; "and I think you have ever been discreet; and I flatter myself I have made it to your interest to be so."

"All true, sir!" responded Mrs. Leslie.

"Well, madam, I shall now put you in possession of another secret, which you must swear never to divulge to a living soul!"

"Why should I swear?" inquired the other. "If you have trusted me heretofore, and found me faithful to your interests, what right have you to suppose, for a moment, that I will betray you now?"

"Ah, my dear Mrs. Leslie, do not construe my language literally!" said Leon, quickly. "I simply meant to impress you with the importance of my secret, and used the term, 'swear,' only in an emphatic sense. I know you will be close and discreet, and I know you will get your reward for being so. I will speak low, if you please—for my communication is for no ear but yours. Pray let me fill your glass!"

"I thank you—no more!" said Mrs. Leslie; "one glass is enough for my weak brain."

"Rather say your active brain, my dear madam! which needs no stimulus to render it quick to perceive, clear to understand, and strong to digest. For myself, unfortunately, I need wine, to induce a proper intellectuality."

He tossed off the third glass, and resumed:

"You must know I have found a most beautiful creature, in needy circumstances, and have fallen desperately in love with her. I have already assisted her pecuniarily, and she is very grateful; but her

gratitude, unfortunately, is the only emotion I have been able to excite. She does not love me in return, and therefore——”

He paused, and Mrs. Leslie added:

“You fear your generous purpose may not be consummated !”

Leon looked at her for a few moments, as if to read her secret thoughts, and be certain she was not speaking ironically ; but whatever those secret thoughts might have been, her calm, smiling features revealed nothing antagonistic to the language she had used. Leon appeared to be satisfied, and resumed :

“She does not know me by my right name, and I have learned, this very night, that I should receive even less favor if she did. I am known to her as Mr. Warren ; and to me, as Mr. Warren, she not an hour since communicated the not very pleasing intelligence, that she looks upon my father with distrust and believes me to be a villain.”

“Which latter you know is not true,” smiled the fair listener.

“I at least know my suit in that quarter would be less likely to thrive, should she learn she had said this much to Leon Dupree himself.”

“Well,” returned Mrs. Leslie, “if I am to be your confidante in this *affaire de cœur*, pray tell me the name of this fair damsel ? and where, in this great round world, is the sacred, though humble, spot of her abode ? and what I can do to assist a poor unfortunate lover like yourself ?”

“Well, as you are to be my confidante, my dear madam—and also, I trust, my assistant—I shall conceal nothing from you. Her name is Linden—Villeta Linden. Ha ! why do you start ?”

"Start?" repeated Mrs. Leslie, in a tone of surprise: "I? me, do you mean?"

"I do not mean myself, surely."

"But *what* do you mean?"

"I saw you start and change color when I mentioned the name of Linden!" rejoined Leon.

"You must have been dreaming—or rather winking, probably, my dear sir!" replied Mrs. Leslie, with a short, gay laugh.

"How winking?" asked Leon: "I do not understand you."

"Why, yes, to be sure! You winked, probably, which changed the light to your eyes, and thus you *seemed* to see a change in my features. Poh! what nonsense! Even if I did start, what of it? I am not her lover, am I? You do not fear me for a rival, do you? Oh, what a jealous set of fellows you men are!"

"But do you know this Villeta Linden?" inquired Leon Dupree, who had been closely watching the face of his hostess, and knew she had started at the name when he mentioned it.

"How should I know her?" she parried. "Is she one I should be likely to know? If so, why does she give you so much trouble to catch?"

Leon Dupree, as we have said of him on a previous occasion, was keen, shrewd, penetrating; and, being a natural schemer, was not easily mastered at a game which he continually played himself—viz: duplicity. He saw, or fancied he saw, there was something which his companion wished to conceal; and this something, which he readily connected with the name of Villeta, might be of importance to him, or it might not—he

could only tell by knowing what it was—and therefore he was very eager to get at the secret. Being himself guilty of all kinds of deception, he, as a matter of course, was naturally suspicious of all others; and his suspicions once excited, on any matter connected with himself, rendered him very uneasy, until such time as he could get a full and satisfactory explanation, or completely fortify himself against a covert and counter design. Therefore the evasive answers of Mrs. Leslie to his questions, annoyed and irritated him much more than he chose to have appear, and much more than she had reason to suppose; and hence, to her last reply, he very gravely and seriously rejoined:

“Mrs. Leslie, if I am to make you my confidante, I must be your confident in return. If you are not prepared and willing for this, I shall not trouble you with any further conversation to-night, and, for the future, we will consider our interests divided.”

“Why, what would you have, Mr. Dupree?” she said, turning slightly pale, and for the first time looking serious and troubled.

“I would have a direct answer to any question I choose to propound!” said Leon, sternly. “I was not dreaming—neither was I *winking*, as you so facetiously affect to suppose—when I mentioned the name of Villeta Linden; and I *did* see you start and change countenance when that name first passed my lips. Pray explain!”

“I have no explanation to offer, sir! If I changed countenance, as you say, I am not aware of it—and certainly I had no cause for doing so.”

“But why did you evade my direct questions?”

"Why, you were jesting, were you not?"

"No, madam—I was not jesting."

"You seem serious enough now, at all events."

"I am serious, I assure you."

"Well, are you satisfied with the explanation, that I have no explanation to offer?"

"Not altogether, madam. Please answer me this, without equivocation! Do you know Villeta Linden?"

"I do not, sir!"

"Did you ever see her?"

"Not to my knowledge."

"Is the name of Linden familiar to you?"

"I have certainly heard the name before."

"Do you know any one of that name?"

"I do not, sir."

"And where did you hear that name mentioned?"

"If I am not mistaken, it is the name of an individual who was accused, some years ago, of robbing a bank, and absconding with the money."

While asking these questions, Leon Dupree kept his dark, piercing eyes riveted upon the features of Mrs. Leslie; but seeing not the slightest change in the expression of her countenance, he at last appeared to become satisfied that there was no good cause for his suspicions; and accordingly replied, in a different tone:

"I was wrong, my dear madam, I see—and I crave your pardon!"

"Granted, sir, with all my heart!" said Mrs. Leslie, with a feeling of relief.

"You are right, Mrs. Leslie—the name of Linden was, some years ago, conspicuous in the papers as a

bank-robber—and that bank-robber was the father of this Villeta."

"Indeed, sir!"

"I did not know it until this evening, or I might have guarded myself against making the acquaintance of the daughter, though she is evidently not to blame for her father's deeds."

"And is it your intention to continue this acquaintance, Mr. Dupree?" inquired the other.

"Why, I am in love with the surpassing beauty of the girl, and I can see no harm in pursuing my pleasure, so that the affair is kept perfectly secret. Deuce take it, my dear madam, a man cannot always select beauty for his pleasure, and have all the antecedents to his liking! I am known to the girl as a Mr. Warren—no one, save yourself, knows anything of the matter—you are not going to expose me—I am not going to marry her—and so, for the rest, what need I care?"

"But in what way do you want my assistance?"

"Ah! that is the point, after all. You must know that this girl is living not far from you, in a miserable old building, which stands in Churchyard Court. She occupies a single room on the second floor, with an only brother, who is almost gone with consumption. They are very poor, and are now in fact living on my bounty. The girl is not only supremely beautiful, but is well educated—has a refined taste—is fond of the fine arts, and has literary talent of no inferior order. In fact, she is now engaged in writing a very pretty story, which I have purchased, and partly paid for—ostensibly for a friend, who is about to start a magazine—but in reality, between you

and me, Mrs. Leslie, merely to give her some money in a way not to wound her delicately sensitive nature. Now I want them to get into better quarters—Villeta at least—where I shall not be ashamed to visit her; and where, through the assistance of one of her sex, my suit may be made to thrive. She is very grateful for what I have done—but I am not her beau ideal—and so, as matters stand, I can make no progress. By having her removed and placed under your care, where a good word will be spoken for me whenever needed, I shall doubtless succeed admirably. Do you understand me?"

"But Marie, Mr. Dupree—what of her?"

"I have thought of that, too. She must take a trip into the country. Go to the sea-shore, for instance—or to the mountains—for the summer season. She will be delighted with the change—especially if so managed that she does not suspect anything, and she is led to suppose it is purely for her benefit and my care for her health. Once out of the way, and this Villeta installed in her place, and I will manage to do without her."

"Your scheme is a bold one, Mr. Dupree!" said Mrs. Leslie, in a quiet tone, that did in no manner betray her real opinion of the author.

"You know I delight in something bold and novel; my dear madam!" smiled the young villain. "Anything to kill time, and destroy *ennui*! I am never so happy as when engaged in an exciting intrigue, which is really the spice of life. Come! let us drink to success!" and he refilled the two empty glasses.

"But what will you do with the brother?" inquired Mrs. Leslie, concealing the feeling of disgust, which

she now, for almost the first time, experienced toward the man who was seeking to make a tool of her to carry out a most wicked and infamous design.

"*He will die soon!*" said Leon, quietly.

"You do not know that—consumptive persons sometimes linger a long time beyond the anticipations of even their physicians."

"Well," said Leon—who had another dark plan in his mind, which was not to be revealed to any one—"what I have proposed, is of course in the event of his death taking place within a month; *and I hardly think he will survive longer than a month, at the farthest.* My first idea was to have him removed here also—but, on second consideration, I think it will be better to wait a short time, and see how his disease progresses."

"But how do you propose to get the consent of this girl, Villeta, to come and live with me? for she must come of her own free will."

"That can be easily managed, I think," replied Leon. "Villeta has no relative—in this part of the world at least—except her brother; and no friends, as she herself informed me; for after the disappearance of her father, the family retired into seclusion, and dropped all their acquaintances who did not drop them. Now my plan is this: I have already spoken to her about moving into better quarters; and the moment she has the means, she will be ready to do so; and the means I will supply, by purchasing her literary articles at a high figure. You are a widow, distantly related to me—to me, Henry Warren, you understand—and are living alone, and want a companion; and you will call on her at my request, and hold

out such inducements to her to make her home with you till she can get better situated, that she, alone and friendless as she is, (or will be, I should say, when she buries her brother,) will not be able to resist. My plan, you see, is simple, and I think feasible—what think you?”

“It appears to be easy of execution,” said Mrs. Leslie.

“It is,” returned young Dupree, with considerable elation, as he drank off his wine; “and for your part in the affair, I expect to pay handsomely. You have never had any reason to complain of me so far—eh! my dear madam?”

“I have always found you very generous when it has come to payment,” returned the other.

“And you always will, Mrs. Leslie—you always will. But remember! we must be very careful of our secret! Marie must get no inkling of the matter; for she will be the devil to deal with, if once we arouse her jealousy; and then Villeta must know me only as Henry Warren; for my real name, once unguardedly spoken, would play the deuce in that quarter too! Forethought and discretion are only required to render my plan effective.”

“Have no fear of me, Mr. Dupree!”

“I have none, my dear madam, or I should not have trusted you with my secret; and you, believe me, are the only one of your sex I would trust with any matter of importance. Is all now settled to your satisfaction?”

“I can think of nothing further,” replied Mrs. Leslie—“except to inquire when I am to begin to play my part?”

"Of that I will inform you in good time," rejoined Leon, rising, and once more filling his glass. "Come!" he said, pointing to her own glass, which stood untasted—"you must venture to drink to our success; and then, after a word with my pretty Marie, I will take my leave, as I have another engagement for to-night."

The glasses were touched—Leon drained his—and then both hostess and guest descended to the parlor.

CHAPTER XI.

THE VICTIM OF A VILLAIN.

THIS parlor, though small, was elegantly and exquisitely furnished, and Leon Dupree had provided the means. All in it—we might almost include the hostess and the fairy-like being who sat at the large, rose-wood piano, with her soft, white, tapering fingers gliding over the ivory keys, and producing sweet sounds—belonged to him. Their taste had selected, and his money had paid for all; and they themselves were little better than his slaves—for they depended on him, and his money supplied their wants. He was emphatically the lord of the dwelling; and now, as he proudly ran his eye over each glittering object, from floor to ceiling, and wall to wall, he felt he could exclaim, with Selkirk of the lonely isle:

"I am monarch of all I survey!"

Marie Souloni, the fairy-like being referred to, was the daughter of a French exile, who had died in Philadelphia about nine months prior to the opening of our

story, leaving her almost penniless and friendless—for her mother had died years before, and all her relatives, none very near akin, were in her native country. She had been idolized by her father, had received a good education, and was well skilled in music, dancing, and drawing, and those minor accomplishments which render a young lady especially attractive in the drawing-room. Her father had at one time been a man of wealth—and had even taken into exile sufficient means to support himself in comfortable circumstances up to the period of his death; but after defraying his funeral expenses, Marie had found herself the possessor of less than a hundred dollars. She was at this period just turned of seventeen—a blooming, beautiful girl—with a good education, refined tastes, and fascinating manners—but without means to continue living in the style to which she had been accustomed. It became necessary, therefore, for her to find employment; and after one or two vain attempts to procure a situation as teacher of music, or drawing, she finally accepted an offer made her by a fashionable milliner, to take a situation in her establishment as a sort of apprentice to the business. Madame Chevenceau, the proprietress of this establishment, was a handsome woman of thirty, without any moral principle, who used her business as a cloak to cover infamy, and who was never known to have in her employ any but young and pretty girls. It was, in fact, the rare beauty of Marie Souloni, which gained her a situation under the eye of one who sought only to dispose of her charms to the highest bidder; and those who know anything of the world, will readily anticipate what followed.

Here, among other gay, dissolute, young spend-thrifts, Marie first became acquainted with Leon Dupree. He professed love, and she did love; he had wealth, and she was fond of splendor; he vowed eternal constancy, and she believed him. In short, young, dazzled, unprotected, lured, and loving, her moral nature gave way, and she became his victim—but under a solemn promise of marriage at a no distant day.

From the establishment of Madame Chevenceau, as soon as room could be made for her by the removal of a previous victim, she was conducted to the elegant little dwelling of Mrs. Leslie, where we now find her, and where she had resided for some months, unsuspecting, contented, and even happy—for she was surrounded by every luxury that heart could desire—was treated as a superior rather than an equal—and, above all, had the full faith of a young, loving, trusting, confiding girl, that the solemn promises of her treacherous seducer would be redeemed. Of Mrs. Leslie herself, we have something to reveal, but not in this connection.

We have said that Marie Souloni was beautiful; but perhaps exceedingly, or exquisitely pretty, would be the better term. She was small, delicately formed, but a perfect model of proportion. Her figure was straight—her bust full and round—her limbs plump, and of an ivory polish—and every movement and attitude was a study for an artist, so perfect was each in natural ease and grace. Her features, too, were full of vivacious animation—with a straight, Grecian nose—a small, pretty mouth—white, pearly teeth—dark, sparkling eyes—arching brows—and a smooth, polished fore-

head, from which her raven hair was combed back and neatly arranged upon the crown and back portion of her head. She was modestly and elegantly dressed; and in the adornment of her person, she in every respect displayed the taste of a lady of high breeding. Her complexion was about the shade of an Anglo-Saxon brunette.

On perceiving Leon, when he entered the parlor with Mrs. Leslie, Marie immediately bounded up from the piano, clapped her little hands for joy, and, with a kind of childish *naïveté*, ran forward to greet him, throwing her arms unreservedly about his neck, and saluting him in a most affectionate, if not passionate, manner.

"*Oh! mon cher ami!*" she cried, delightedly—"I am so glad you have come—for you know *je vous aime*—do you not now, dear Leon?"

"Yes, my darling," returned Leon, throwing his arm fondly around his poor, deluded victim; "I know you love me, sweet Marie—but not more than I love you."

"You make me very happy!" rejoined Marie. "But where have you been so long? My heart has been sad because you have not been near me for many a *bon jour*."

"I had some business which detained me, dear Marie."

"I was afraid you were sick! You must not stay away so long again!"

"Even now my stay must be short," returned Leon—"for I have an engagement to fulfill this very night—and only came, that I might put your mind at ease."

"Ah! must you leave me again so soon?" said Marie, a shade of sadness passing over her pretty face.

"I do not like to leave you so soon, dear Marie, but I have no choice," replied Leon.

"You look troubled, my Leon!" pursued Marie, as she riveted her dark eyes upon his face.

"I did not know it."

"Has anything happened, dear Leon, to trouble you?" she quickly demanded, with an expression of uneasiness.

"Nothing that need trouble you, Marie."

"But your troubles are my troubles!" she rejoined, with increased anxiety. "Oh! come—sit down and tell your little Marie all about it!"

"Not to-night, my angel."

"You do not love me then!" she returned, pouting her pretty lips.

"You have no right to say that, Marie!" he replied, reproachfully.

"Oh! no, my Leon—I was only in jest. But you will tell me now—will you not?"

"I will tell you of a pleasant surprise I have for you," he answered, seating himself upon a plush-sofa, and drawing her fondly to him—while Mrs. Leslie, at a sign from him, quietly withdrew.

"Oh! yes—pleasant surprises are so delightful!" cried Marie, joyously, again clapping her hands. "Come, Leon—what is it?"

"No less than a delightful trip to the sea-shore for you, to remain during the hot season."

"With you, my Leon?"

"Why, I fear I shall be compelled to remain in the city."

"Then I will remain," said Marie. "What care I for the sea-shore, if you are not there? You are all the world to me. Where you are, is happiness—where you are not, is misery."

This answer did not please the dark schemer, for he saw it would not be an easy matter to get rid of her without awakening her suspicions of a sinister design; and once let her suspicions be aroused, there was a fire of passion, and a strength of will, in her ardent French nature, that might prove troublesome, to say the least. He thought rapidly, and replied:

"You will have to be without me, even here, I fear, my sweet Marie!"

"How so?" she quickly demanded.

"Why, my father has some business in the West, in an unsettled state, and will send me to see to it."

"But you just said you were going to remain in the city!" rejoined Marie.

Leon colored, for he saw he had caught himself, but quickly replied:

"I said that to put your mind at ease, dearest."

"Said which?"

"That I should remain in town—for the truth is, I did not wish to render you uneasy."

"Let me go with you!"

"No! that cannot be, Marie."

"And why do you wish me to go to the sea-shore?"

"Because you will find it very pleasant there, and more healthy than here."

"I will not go without you my Leon! I should be unhappy among strangers; I will stay here till you return; but I shall be very sad, wherever I am."

"Suppose you go with me a short distance! and

then we shall not be so long parted!" said Dupree, as a new plan rapidly formed itself in his mind.

"Where shall I go?"

"Accompany me to the mountains."

"What mountains?"

"The Alleghanies."

"And what then?"

"I will place you in delightful quarters, among the beauties of nature, and the time will not seem long till I return to you."

"Ah! Leon," sighed Marie—"you do not love as I love!"

"Why do you think so?"

"Because you say the time will not seem long till you return. If every day was an age, you would not say so."

"And do you then love me so exceedingly, dear Marie?" inquired Leon, playfully, feeling quite flattered

"Do you doubt it?"

"I would not, for it makes me happy."

"And your happiness is mine," rejoined the young girl, fondly: "therefore, in making you happy, I make myself happy—in loving you, I love myself."

"It will be hard to part from you, Marie, for even a brief season!" pursued Leon, playing with her dark hair; "but I can only take you with me the distance I have named; and if you would add to my happiness, you must accede to my wishes."

"But why not let me remain here with Mrs. Leslie? She is very kind—and I shall feel lonely among strangers."

"You must have a reason for everything!" re-

turned Leon, somewhat petulantly—"is that love? I thought love was trusting, confiding, self-sacrificing!"

"You may add, jealous and exacting," said Marie.

"I have told you why I do not wish you to remain here, Marie!" continued Leon.

"I do not remember it."

"Your memory is short. Did I not say you would find it more pleasant and healthy elsewhere? and it is for your pleasure and health I am solicitous. And then, if you must know all, I confess I am a little jealous."

"Jealous! of me? of your own little Marie?" exclaimed the girl, in a tone of surprise.

"And that proves I love, by your own words, my pretty one!" smiled Leon; "for you just now said truly, that love is jealous and exacting."

"But you have no cause to be jealous of me, Leon!" pouted Marie.

"No! but I might have, were I to leave you alone, for any considerable time, in this great city of temptations."

"Then why not make me your wife at once, and put me under the *surveillance* of your friends and relations."

"All in good time, Marie—I am not yet ready."

"But you will fulfil your promise?"

"Do you doubt me?"

"Of late I have had fears."

"Why of late?"

"You come less frequently, and seem colder."

"Fancy—mere fancy, Marie! True, I have not been to see you for some days, because I have been

detained away by business, as I said ; and even now I am compelled to leave you, in order to settle some matters which must be arranged prior to my departure for the West."

"But will not to-morrow answer your purpose?"

"No ! I must see a certain party to-night. Why, deuce take it ! (looking at his watch,) it is now the hour of my appointment. Really, I must be going !"

"Leon !" said Marie, starting up quickly, stepping in front of him, placing a hand upon each of his shoulders, and looking him keenly and steadily in the eye—"have you seen any one you love better than Marie Souloni ?"

"You amaze me, Marie !"

"Answer me, Leon !"

"You doubt me then ?"

"Ha ! you color !—your eye quails !"

"Upon my word, no wonder !" returned Leon, affecting to laugh—"your own eye has such a wild, serious gleam ! Do I love another better than Marie Souloni ? How can you seriously ask so foolish a question, Marie ?"

"When shall I be made your wife ?" pursued Marie, without changing her position, or removing her dark eyes from his, through which she seemed to be looking down into his darker soul.

"Do you wish me to name the day ?"

"It would make me happy."

"Well, then, on our return from the West."

"Why not before we leave ?—for I will go, to please you."

"It does not suit me, my sweet Marie ! and a few days, or weeks, I know, will make no difference with you."

"Be it so, then!" sighed Marie; "but I shall exact the fulfilment of this promise!"

"You will have no occasion, pretty Marie!" he replied, drawing her fondly to him.

"When shall we set out for the West, dear Leon?" she inquired.

"Be ready at any moment—for, uncertain myself now, I may not be able to give you more than a few hours' notice."

"And are you going far beyond the mountains that you tell about?"

"A thousand miles, my love."

"Oh! if anything should happen to you," cried Marie, in some alarm, "what would become of poor me?"

"But nothing will happen, my pretty one!"

"A cloud comes over my spirit while I think, Leon."

"Fancy, Marie—fancy!"

"Oh! you must not go, Leon!"

"But I must, Marie."

"Something will happen!"

"How do you know?"

"I feel it. There is trouble for me, Leon—and it will come through you."

"How through me, Marie?" inquired Dupree, with some uneasiness.

"I do not know. I felt thus before my father died—and he was then in good health."

"Do you think I am going to die?" inquired Leon, turning pale.

"I think, if you leave me, something dreadful will happen to you or me! My spirit is sensitive; and

approaching danger, even when comparatively distant, seems to cast its shadow upon it. From my earliest recollections, I have ever been warned of sad realities—and the shadow of warning is upon me now. Do not go, Leon !”

She spoke earnestly and pleadingly, and with her dark eyes fixed steadily upon the dark eyes of Leon, who began to feel strangely ill at ease.

“Why, it seems to me that a sudden change has come over you, dear Marie !” he said.

“It has come almost within the moment,” she replied ; “but the warning should be none the less heeded ! Do not go, dear Leon !”

“I must, Marie, and you must go with me !” he rejoined.

“But may I not go as your wife then ?” she asked, earnestly : “for then, let what will come, I shall have the *right* to stand by you, before all the world !”

“It cannot be, Marie—there are reasons why it cannot be, which you shall know in good time.”

“Do with me as you will then !” she sighed.

“Come !” he said, rallying ; “you must not give way to every fancy !”

“Nor would I, if heretofore the reality had not always followed what you term the fancy,” she answered.

“Poh ! you are only a little low-spirited, from an exaggerated view of our separation and my journey ; but the latter will be without danger, and we shall have a happy meeting. Come ! take some wine, and sing me a gay song ! and then I will bid you *bon soir*.”

He turned to the wall, rang a bell, and gave orders

to the colored servant, who answered his summons, to bring a bottle of wine, and request her mistress to return to the parlor. Mrs. Leslie soon appeared, bringing the wine herself. At the earnest solicitation of Leon, both drank, and with the first glass the spirits of Marie became more buoyant. The conversation gradually grew lively, even to merriment—Marie sang a couple of her gayest songs—and before midnight, Leon Dupree, well pleased with his management, rose to take his leave.

"Be ready when I come for you, dear Marie!" he said, as he pressed a parting kiss upon her lips. "*Au revoir!*"

"*Bon soir, mon cher ami!*" she replied, externally smiling, but internally sighing.

"Good night!" said Mrs. Leslie.

"I would I were safely rid of her!" muttered Leon, as he hurried away up the street; "and to get rid of her, I shall have to make a cursed journey to the mountains. Once there, I am safe—for three months, at least—and a great deal can be done in three months. Your reign is over, Mademoiselle Marie! for another, more lovely, has won my heart. Villeta must and shall be mine!"

"Is his love growing cold?" mused Marie Souloni, as she turned away, after her parting with Leon Dupree. "Has he found another that pleases his fancy? Why this cloud upon my spirit, bringing distrust of his affection, if all be well? Would he play her false who has loved and still loves him—who has trusted and still trusts him—and who has given proof of her

love and trust, at a sacrifice of more than life? Let him beware! Play false to me? No! no! I will not so wrong him! Yet the shadow of distrust grows darker upon my spirit! Let him beware of changing the love of an angel into the hate of a demon! for she who can sacrifice for love, can sacrifice for hate—and woe to him who changes the love into hate of Marie Souloni!"

"Shall I always be compelled to act against my better nature?" muttered Mrs. Leslie, as she hurriedly paced up and down her own elegant boudoir, soon after the departure of Leon Dupree. "It is many years since I first plunged deep into vice—since I was first betrayed and ruined for this world, and perhaps the next; but if I know my own heart, it was never so base as to wish to see the young, lovely, and innocent dragged down to my own level—never so base as his who has this night unfolded a most damnable scheme, to ruin one whom I suspect to be the daughter of Ellen Courtney, my once friend and companion? Ah! Leon Dupree, I have served you well—too well for the rest of my conscience—and my equivalent has been your gold! But beware how you presume too far! There is a limit, even in vice, which one of my nature cannot pass. Beware of that deeper, darker wrong from which even the degraded spirit of Margaret Leslie recoils!"

CHAPTER XII.

THE LAWYER AND HIS STUDENT.

ONE fine, delightful morning, about a week from the date of the events recorded in the six preceding chapters, Amos Vincent, a lawyer of no little distinction, was seated in his elegantly furnished office on Walnut street. Two windows opened upon the street, and faced the principal avenue of Independence Square; and looking up through the green vista, you could perceive a small portion of that memorable building in which was signed that world-renowned document which gave birth to Liberty and rendered America a nation of Freemen; and you could even perceive the very spot where the noble sentiments and principles it contained were first thundered forth to the people—sentiments and principles which have since found response in millions of happy hearts.

Mr. Vincent sat near one of the windows—both of which were open—and was alternately looking out, and directing his attention to some person within. He was between forty and fifty years of age—rather portly in figure—with a shrewd, intellectual face—a dark, keen eye—and a high, massive forehead.

“Yes,” he said, pursuing a conversation which had commenced anterior to the moment of his introduction into our story, “Grace is a fine girl—a fine girl—a little too wild, eccentric, and coquettish, I grant you—but still one who has a good heart—all too good for the frivolous, rakish, dissolute young jackanapes who

buzz around her like bees around a flower ; and who seek to win her hand—not for herself alone—not for her own intrinsic merits—but for her wealth, which they are eager to grasp, and, once grasped, would be as eager to squander. It is even rumored that one of these fellows has the promise of her hand ; but I don't believe it ; for I have always given Grace De Vere the credit of possessing a large share of common sense ; and it certainly would be no proof of my sagacity, so far as she is concerned, if she were to wed that conceited, perfumed manikin, Mark Wellsford ! Now if she really wants a husband—and heaven knows she need be in no hurry these five years ! my wife was twenty-five when I married her, and she is none the worse for it now—if she is in want of a husband, I say, let her choose a man of heart, of mind, of soul—a man of virtue, principle, and honor—no matter if he has not a dollar—and, in five years—ay, even from the start—she will find herself occupying a far better position than any of these puppets of a *soi disant* aristocracy can give her, though their wealth be sufficient to weigh her down with diamonds. For instance”—added Mr. Vincent, facing round from the window and looking steadily at the young man he was addressing, who was seated at a large table, with a quantity of books, papers, and manuscripts lying before him—“let her choose Herbert Raymond.”

As this name passed the lips of Mr. Vincent, the young man who sat facing him, and who had been giving eager attention to his remarks, suddenly blushed crimson, and seemed overwhelmed with surprise and confusion. He essayed to reply—but it was some moments ere he could succeed in articulating a syl-

lable ; and then he seemed compelled to jerk forth the words :

"Sir—Mr. Vincent—really—you are—very kind—but——"

"But what, Herbert?" cried the other, in a kind of cheering tone. "Bless my soul, man, speak out, and never fear me ! I am not the young and charming Miss De Vere—but a very staid, matter-of-fact old lawyer—and so I see no necessity for your blushing like a new-born infant. Courage ! my young friend—courage ! Umph ! at your age I could stand unmoved before a whole battery of the brightest female eyes in Christendom ; and here you are now, shrinking back, like a whipped spaniel, at the bare idea of facing one !"

"But, sir—Mr. Vincent—consider——"

"Ay ! consider what ?—that is what I want to get at—consider what ?"

"That—that—I have no pretensions—to—to the hand of Miss De Vere !" still stammered Herbert Raymond.

"And who said you had ? I did not. I said if she were to choose you, instead of some of these aristocratic fools, she would show her good sense ; and if she were to choose you, you *could* have pretensions to her hand, if it suited you—eh ?"

"Certainly, sir ! and I beg your pardon for misunderstanding you !" replied the young man, recovering himself.

"And suppose she does not choose you—or at least does not choose to tell you so," pursued Mr. Vincent, "what is to hinder you from choosing her ? ay, and winning her too ?"

"A knowledge of our unequal positions."

"Unequal nonsense!" cried the other, warmly.
"What do you mean? Explain yourself!"

"Why, Mr. Vincent, you know Miss Grace De Vere, besides the splendid mansion in which she lives, is worth over three hundred thousand dollars—all of which is safely invested at six per cent., and from which she derives an income of some twenty thousand dollars per annum."

"No one knows better than myself what Grace is worth, since I hold her property in trust, transact all her business, make all her investments, and pay all her orders," replied the lawyer.

"Very well, sir," pursued the other—"you know I am worth nothing—or at least nothing in comparison with the party named."

"In stocks, real estate, bonds, mortgages, etc., granted!" replied Mr. Vincent.

"Then shall I presume to offer my miserable self to Miss Grace, in the expectation of being preferred to better-looking men, and men of wealth?"

"Why, bless my soul! what are you talking about?" cried the lawyer. "Do you think Grace is such a downright fool as to accept her richest suitor, merely because of his wealth, when she has got more of her own than she knows what to do with? Fie on you now! I thought you had a better opinion of the girl!"

"But is it not customary, Mr. Vincent, for one person of wealth to mate with another of similar fortune?"

"And are there not a great many customs that are very foolish?" rejoined the lawyer. "But speaking of custom, Grace herself is an exception to all rules ;

and would be more likely to marry a poor man than a rich one, if only to keep up her character of doing something different from other people, and provoking comment: so your chance, so far as money is concerned, is just as good as that of a millionaire. And I flatter myself Grace likes you—how is it?"

"I do not know," replied Herbert Raymond, looking down in some confusion, while the hot blood rushed to his temples.

"You are on good terms with her—eh?"

"I believe so."

"You have never quarrelled?"

"No, sir!"

"She invites you to her soirees?"

"Sometimes."

"Does she not always?"

"Perhaps she does—but I do not always attend."

"Why not?"

"I do not like some of the parties I meet there."

"Whom do you mean?"

"Wellsford for one; Huntington for another; Dupree for a third; and I can name some half a dozen more if necessary."

"By-the-by, since you mention your dislike of Dupree," said the lawyer, "allow me to observe, confidentially, that I believe him to be, with the exception of his father, one of the greatest scoundrels unhung! He has more brains than all the others you allude to put together; and he makes a bad use of every faculty he possesses. It grieves and vexes me to think that Grace can endure him near her! And yet, I am told, they are quite intimate; and some say he stands in as high favor as Mark Wellsford!"

"Would it not be well for you to speak to her—to advise her?" said Herbert, earnestly.

"It would do no good, bless your soul! it would do no good—she would only laugh at me!" replied Mr. Vincent. "She always would have her own way, and that way was always sure to be in opposition to the advice of her best friends. She boasts that she was never conquered even in infancy; and I have reason to believe her; for her mother died when she was only two years old; and her father, good, easy man—God rest his soul—was about as fit to govern her as I am to command a naval fleet. In fact, he never did govern her—but indulged her in every caprice; and so she grew up, in the full sense of the term, a spoiled beauty. Her father, as you know, was my friend; and when he died, about six years ago, he bequeathed most of his property to me, in trust for Grace—appointing me executor of his will, and guardian of his child. It was a responsible undertaking, and one I did not covet, I assure you; but Colonel De Vere was my bosom friend, and I had not the heart to refuse his last request. Besides, Grace herself, then a budding girl, approved of every thing, and insisted that I should not only be her guardian, but her adopted father. Well, I have been to her as much of a father as lay in my power; but, bless my soul! I have had no control over her whatever. For six months she made her home in my family; but that was as long as she and my wife could agree; and then she begged me to let her return to the family mansion, and put herself under the care of a maiden aunt, who wanted a comfortable home, and was willing to take charge of her. My wife united with Grace in the petition, to

let her go—and, in truth, I was not loth to get her partially off my hands. So she returned to her father's mansion—re-furnished it in more costly style—installed her aunt as nominal mistress, and they have resided together ever since. As I have heard no complaints, I presume they get along together very well. Doubtless each is her own mistress, both do as they please, and therefore both are contented. The aunt, still a maiden, and not

‘Ower young to marry,’

is fond of gay company, I understand; and Grace gives parties whenever the whim takes her, and is always the gayest of the gay.”

“And such is the person you would recommend to me for a life-companion!” said Herbert Raymond, turning aside his face, that Mr. Vincent might not perceive the expression which he feared would betray the secret of his heart.

“Why,” said the lawyer, with a smile, looking steadily at the other, who still kept his face averted—“I profess to have some knowledge of human nature; and, wild as Grace is, I believe there is one thing will tame her yet.”

“And what may that be?”

“Love!”

At this word, the color deepened on young Raymond's features—but he did not change his position, nor venture a reply.

“Come!” pursued the other, in a rallying tone—“do not play off with your best friend! Confess, now, you are in love with this mad-cap Grace!”

“Who? me?” cried Herbert, looking up in confusion.

"Ay, you—Herbert Raymond!" laughed the other.

"Really—Mr. Vincent"—

"Confess, now—confess!" cried the lawyer, gaily.

"But why—why—do you—you think so?" stammered the young man.

"Simply because I have read your heart as thoroughly as any law-book in my library—and love for Grace De Vere is written all over it in a good round hand."

"You are surely jesting, sir!"

"Not in the least, my young friend, except in the playful manner of expressing myself. Why, bless my soul! do you really fancy you have kept this matter a secret all this time? Indeed, sir, you have proclaimed it every time the name of Grace De Vere has been mentioned in your hearing!"

"Me, sir?" said Herbert, in surprise. "I do not understand you, Mr. Vincent."

"So it seems," laughed the other; "but I understand you, my friend. Let me explain! I have been a lawyer at the bar for over twenty years; and, during that period, have had a most excellent opportunity for studying the human face, on the witness' stand, under every trying circumstance you can name; and rightly considering it an essential point in my profession, to be able to read the heart from the face, so as to get at the truth under difficulties, I flatter myself I have become quite an adept in the art—though even a novice need make no error in regard to yourself. Well, when your father brought you to me—a raw youth from the country, some five years ago—with an earnest request that I would serve him, by making a man of you, I said to myself, 'Nature will do that—it only remains

for me to make a lawyer of him !' I saw at once you had a clear, comprehensive intellect—and, to make it useful, a pure, single, guileless heart. I readily undertook the task of educating you to my profession, and have not lived to repent of it."

"I thank you, sir !" said Herbert, in a tone of deep emotion.

"I did not introduce these remarks for the purpose of complimenting you to your face," pursued the other ; "but simply to explain, that I did read your heart aright at first, and have read it aright ever since ; and to tell you, that I knew you were deeply charmed with Grace when you first beheld her, and that I have watched the first emotion gradually ripen into love, which your frank, open, ingenuous countenance betrays whenever her name is mentioned in your hearing.

"It is true," continued Mr. Vincent, earnestly, "I have never mentioned this matter to you before, for want of a suitable opportunity—but, for a long time, it has been my hope that you would eventually be united. Why not ? You are the senior of Grace by some two years, and at least her equal in every respect except wealth ; and why should the predominance of mere gold, on either side, be considered in a matter which, it may be, concerns the happiness of two noble hearts ? You love Grace, I know ; and I really believe the sentiment is mutual—though she is such a puzzle, I dare not speak positively ; but I will venture to assert, that if in truth she does love you, and it is ever your fortune to unite your destiny with hers, you will ever find her as true to every correct and noble principle as the needle to the polar star. Grace seems

wild, wayward, giddy, thoughtless, and reckless, I grant you; but this is her exterior nature, if I may so speak; her heart, I honestly believe, is pure, noble, sincere, confiding, trusting, loving. She is at present evidently disposed to set at defiance the opinions of the world around her; and I am sorry it is so; for I think it a duty each individual owes to society, to conform to all customs of general propriety; but still it would take much evidence to convince me that, under any circumstances, she could be induced to commit an absolute wrong. One noble trait I may mention to you in confidence: I know, positively, that within the last few years, Grace De Vere has given away, in secret charity, many thousands of dollars; and not one in ten, who has received her aid, has ever had the remotest idea that she was the generous donor."

"Which speaks volumes in her praise!" said Herbert Raymond, with an enthusiastic glow.

"Ay, sir—does it not?"

"But do you really think," continued Herbert, after a pause, "that she ever bestows a thought upon me, except when I am present?"

"I do believe she thinks of you oftener than of any other person of her acquaintance," answered the lawyer.

Herbert colored still more deeply, as he modestly inquired:

"May I know why you think so?"

"By signs which I think are unmistakable. She comes here often, especially of late, and frequently on very frivolous pretences; and if you are present, she is all smiles and animation; but if you happen to

be absent, I can see that she is disappointed, and that her wit and gayety are more forced. Her stay, too, if you are absent, is generally of very short duration ; but she never departs without inquiring, in a seemingly careless manner, if you are well, and so forth ; and as she mentions your name, she manages to turn aside her face—though not so as to prevent me from detecting an unusual glow. About two months since, when you were confined to the house, she came ; and on my informing her you were ill, she turned very pale, and made many anxious inquiries ; and it was not till I had thrice assured her that you would be out in a few days, that she seemed satisfied you were not in danger. You may not know, but I do, that not a day passed from that time, during your sickness, that she did not either call at my house, or my office, to see me on some trifling business, and she never left without inquiring about yourself.

“All this may mean nothing, but I think otherwise,” pursued Mr. Vincent ; “and as I said before, I think you can win her hand if you choose ; and to see you united, would afford me pleasure—for you could take care of her wealth, and her wealth, so to speak, would take care of you. Not but what I think you capable of maintaining yourself, and even amassing a competency ; for you have just been admitted to the bar, with a clever knowledge of law—and, with some further assistance from myself, I am confident you will rise high in the profession ; but I like you both, and would like to see you both happy ; and I have no desire to see you struggle up through a long series of years, as I was compelled to do before I could feel myself above want.”

"You are very, very kind, Mr. Vincent—and, I assure you, I am not wanting in gratitude!" returned the young man, with tearful eyes.

"Well do I know you are not, Herbert!" rejoined the other. "And now that I have spoken freely, and given you, as I believe, the key to the heart of Grace De Vere, I will drop the subject, and leave the rest to you. You have some letters there?"

"Yes, sir!" said Herbert, rising and handing several to Mr. Vincent. "All came by post except one, and that was left here, this morning, by a servant in livery."

"Ha!" said the lawyer, as he opened the one which came by hand, and glanced at the signature; "this is from Basil Dupree—what can he want with me? Why, bless my soul!" he cried, the next moment, starting up from his seat—"he thinks his wife the sole legal inheritrix of the Ackland property!"

"Indeed!" exclaimed young Raymond, in surprise.

"Yes—listen!" And he read:

No. — Walnut street, June 19th, 1836

"AMOS VINCENT, ESQ.:

"*Dear Sir:* I have just seen your advertisement in the papers, making inquiry for the legal heirs of the estate and property of Thomas Ackland, lately deceased at Manchester, England. I beg leave to inform you, that I think my present wife—formerly Lucy Eldridge, grand-daughter of John Ackland, who was own brother to the late Thomas Ackland—the only *legal* claimant—all the other living descendants of the aforesaid John Ackland being illegitimate.

From my European correspondent, I had heard of the decease of my wife's great uncle before seeing your advertisement; and from him I learned, for the first time, that the great bank-robber, Eldridge Linden, was first cousin to my wife; but he is dead; and it is said his children (he left two) are, if living, illegitimate, and therefore not entitled to inherit. I have called twice to see you, and will call again soon, and confer with you on this important matter. I write this merely to give you a hint how to proceed, in case you are visited by any other parties pretending to have claims to the aforesaid property.

“Meantime, I am, Dear Sir,

“Very Respectfully Yours,

“BASIL DUPREE.”

“Whe-e-w!” whistled the lawyer—“Here is a discovery! Eldridge Linden a cousin of Dupree's wife! and this Thomas Ackland a grand uncle of both! You remember hearing of Eldridge Linden, Herbert, about the time you came to live with me? He disappeared suddenly—and the next day it was discovered the —— Bank, of which he was at the time cashier, had been robbed of some several hundred thousand dollars—and by some one who had entered with the proper keys, as not a lock was broken or a bolt forced.”

“I remember the circumstance very well,” replied the young man.

“But do you know, also, that certain parties have always suspected that this Linden, who passed as a very worthy, upright man, was foully dealt with—and that a certain individual, whom it may not be proper to name, robbed the bank himself, and has since been living on his ill-gotten gains?”



"Good heavens!" cried Herbert, with a start of surprise—"you surely do not mean Dupree?"

"Hush! I mentioned no names. But is it not a little curious he should say, in this letter, that Eldridge Linden is dead? How does he *know* he is dead—eh? This statement, taken in connection with some other matters, seems significant of something, and I shall bear it in mind. And he says the children are illegitimate! Umph! we shall see! Eldridge Linden and Lucy Eldridge! Yes, these are the names mentioned as the grand-children of John Ackland. Strange! It never occurred to me that this Eldridge Linden was the bank-cashier! and little did I dream of Lucy Eldridge-being the wife of Basil Dupree! Umph! I must thank Mr. Dupree for this letter—it contains valuable information. But where are these Lindens? If living, they must be found. I hope they are living, and can prove themselves legitimate—for I should be very sorry to have all this property fall into the hands of a scoundrel!"

The latter portion of the lawyer's remarks were uttered in a low, musing tone, as if he were rather thinking aloud than addressing Herbert Raymond; and just as he concluded, there was a clatter of horses' hoofs on the flinty pavement, and a loud, clear, musical, "Who-a! my bonny black Bess!" rang out upon the still air.

"Why, bless my soul!" cried Mr. Vincent, looking out of the window—"if here is not that mad-cap, Grace, in company with Mark Wellsford! Now who on earth, except Grace herself, would have thought of riding on horseback over the burning pavements under such a hot summer sun? But she is determined to do nothing like anybody else. Here she comes!"

"Hold bonny Bess, Marky!" cried the same gay, musical voice, just outside the door of the lawyer's office: "don't let her go now, as you value your life! I will be back in a couple of hours; I want to see my dear papa;" and with a ringing laugh, Grace De Vere bounded into the apartment where we have been for some time quietly listening to the conversation of the two occupants.

CHAPTER XIII.

THE BRILLIANT HEIRESS.

THERE are certain faces to which neither pen nor pencil can do justice. We may describe every feature minutely, and yet convey no idea of the ever varying expression, as the bright soul gleams out in fitful flashes, like the vivid, beautiful playings of the constantly changing aurora borealis. We may put all the lineaments upon canvas—with the proper size, shape, and color of each, and even give the expression of repose—and yet fail to convey to the beholder more than a faint idea of the original; because the vital vivacity—the light of life—the hundred instant flashes of the soul—each an expression in itself, and all blending into one to the eye—are wanting in the likeness.

Such a face was Grace De Vere's—not remarkable except when animated with a soul of great individuality, and then remarkable to a degree which defies description. In repose, her eyes were grey, large,

full, and lustrous ; but they could change their hue with every mood of their versatile owner, and there were times when they might be described as sparkling black. They were eyes which, under certain conditions, seemed capable of penetrating to the very soul and reading your secret thoughts, while they concealed the secret thoughts and motives of her who bent them upon you ; and they had a magnetic power of fascination which all felt who encountered them. The face was slightly oval, large and full, with a broad, high forehead, the whole lighted up with an intellectuality of no common order. The features were regular ; the nose slightly angular ; the mouth small, with plump, pouting lips, showing a line of white, beautiful teeth beneath—and there were dimples on the cheeks and chin. Her hair was a dark brown, soft and shiny, and was sometimes arranged on her head in a prudish mode, and sometimes was made to descend around her face and neck in a profusion of ringlets. Her figure, scarcely reaching the medium height, was too broad to be a model of grace and beauty ; but she had a small, white, dimpled hand—a fine, well-rounded arm—a pretty foot—and her skin was soft, fair, and clear—her complexion inclining rather to the blonde than brunette.

Such were the externals of Grace De Vere—who, in mere physical beauty, was surpassed by hundreds of her sex ; but when she brought her soul into full play, she dazzled, and fascinated, and carried the palm over all competitors. It was her boast that, never having been conquered and governed herself, it was her right to conquer, govern, and rule all others—and, by one means and another, she pretty generally suc-

ceeded in doing so. She was one who, had she even been penniless, would have created a sensation in whatever circle she might have figured—and with twenty thousand a year, her charms were of course irresistible.

Great was the contrast between Grace De Vere and Herbert Raymond—as, attired in a neatly fitting riding dress, with her cap set jantily on her head, her face brilliant with the light of her soul, and her eyes sparkling like diamonds, she tripped up to the young lawyer, who sat blushing and abashed, and, holding out her pretty hand, said :

“ Upon my soul—I will not say honor—for that article is monopolized by all the fops who can get a tailor, a hatter, and a boot-maker to send them round town as walking advertisements—upon my soul, I say, Mr. Raymond, I have a mind to give you the greatest scolding that ever came from woman’s tongue!—and I would do it too, only I am certain you will some day marry a shrew, and I can afford to wait till then for my revenge !”

“ What have I done, Miss De Vere ?” seriously inquired Herbert—as, nearly overwhelmed with confusion, he awkwardly rose from his seat, mechanically seized the proffered hand of the other, squeezed it, shook it, and then, bethinking himself, dropped it suddenly, and seemed puzzled to know what to do with his own hands afterward.

It may be as well to say, in this connection, that Herbert Raymond was not by nature an Adonis, and no one had ever accused him of being graceful. Tall, bony, and muscular—with large hands and feet—a strongly marked face—with high cheek bones, a Roman

nose, a large mouth, and thick lips—with pale blue eyes, sandy hair, and a reddish complexion—he certainly had never passed in broad daylight for a handsome man. But he had an intellect of a very superior order; a soul, pure, upright, noble; was modest and unassuming; and those who knew him well, looked beyond the external form, and loved and admired him for his moral and intellectual worth.

“What have you done?” repeated Grace, trying to look serious, but giving way the next moment to a wild burst of ringing laughter, as she noticed his awkwardness and confusion, which was mainly owing to the conversation between him and Mr. Vincent previous to her entrance: “What have you done?” she repeated again, as soon as she could stop her laughter, catch her breath, and recover her voice: “why, you have nearly crushed my poor little hand between your great, rough fingers, for one thing.”

“I beg your pardon, Miss De Vere!” returned Herbert, rather coldly, and straightening himself up in a somewhat dignified manner: “It was my awkwardness. It shall not occur again!”

“Is it actionable, dear papa?” cried Grace, wheeling round to Mr. Vincent, who stood near the window, half convulsed with laughter. “Will an action lie?”

“Some actions will *lie*!” returned the lawyer, gaily; “but I think that was an action of *truth*—at least it was the action of a truthful man.”

“Would you advise me to prosecute?”

“Yes, make a suit of it, by all means!”

“Would it suit—eh?” laughed Grace, playing upon the word.

“Ask Herbert himself. He is now a lawyer, and capable of taking almost any case in hand.”

"Even such a hard case as me—eh?"

"Even you, I hope."

"By-the-by, dear papa," pursued Grace, with a mischievous twinkle of the eye, "I want to ask you a serious question, which I should have propounded the moment I came in here."

"Well, what is it?"

"How do you do? how is your health?"

"I thank you, I am well," replied the lawyer, who generally disposed himself to enter into the sphere of frolic which emanated from Grace.

"I thought you were," said Grace; "for you look well, and laugh well, but show a bad set of teeth. I suppose you wore them out *chewing* the bitter cud of repentance for the sins of the profession! Ah! well-a-day! it is not every trade that can afford to be honest. How is Mrs. Vincent and the family?"

"All well," replied the other. "How is your aunt?"

"Fine! never better, though one time younger."

"You and she get along pretty well together—eh?"

"Yes," laughed Grace—"I am pretty, and she is well, and so we are pretty well together. Everything works admirably about our establishment. If I am engaged with one beau, and another drops in, I turn number two over to aunty; and as she is only forty-five, and was never married, she takes it for granted he came expressly to see her—and woe to him if he gives her cause to suspect otherwise!"

"Apropos, Grace, I have heard you are about to be married."

"Well, you see I am about, and of course I live in

hopes of being able to find some one of your ungainly sex who will be willing to take a white slave for twenty thousand dollars per annum."

"It is *on dit* you are engaged to the gentleman who waits without."

"To Mark Wellsford, the dear little fellow? Who says so?"

"Well, I have heard it from more than one source. Is it true?"

"Rather think it is!" laughed Grace: "You know everything *on dit* is true. Certain it is, I am engaged to him in one way."

"What is that?"

"Why, the other evening, he complained of my having treated him somewhat coldly; and I assured him, upon my soul—you know I discard the word honor, and one must asseverate by something—I assured him, upon my soul, I would soon give him occasion to take back his words in the presence of many witnesses. Now am I not engaged to him so far?"

"Until you make your promise good, I think."

"Well, just look out of the window, and see if I am not in a fair way of doing so."

"What do you mean, Grace?"

"Why, is not that dear little fellow perspiring freely? and do you not think he will have occasion to take back his words and say I have treated him somewhat *warmly*, after I shall have trotted him round in this hot sun an hour or two longer?"

"Faith! I think he will!" laughed the lawyer. "Ah! Grace, do you know you are very wild?"

"Wild, dear papa?" laughed Grace. "Why,

bless your dear soul ! I think I am as tame as a pet bear."

. "Really, I do not know what to make of you."

"Then do not try to make anything of me ! Please consider me already made ! and by a work-man, too !"

"Seriously, I do not approve of the company you draw around you ! This Wellsford is an idle, dissipated spendthrift ; Huntington is a fortune-hunter, if not a professional gambler ; Lacy is half knave and half fool ; and Dupree is a shrewd, plotting villain !"

"Well, go on, dear papa !" said Grace, with a slight curl of her lip, and a peculiar twinkle of the eye : "you have only just begun the list."

"I have named all I know," replied Mr. Vincent. "Are there many more ?"

"Oh, yes—a score at least."

"And if they are all of the same stamp, I pray Heaven to deliver you from evil."

"Suppose," returned Grace, "we put it in the litany thus : 'From spendthrifts, fortune-hunters, gamblers, knaves, fools, villains, and lawyers, good Lord deliver us !' Oh ! I cry your mercy, dear papa !" pursued the mischievous girl, in a quick, startled tone, and with a very serious face. "Why, *you* are a lawyer, are you not ? Dear me ! how stupid of me to pray to be delivered from you ! and from my dear friend there—the honest, *truthful* Mr. Raymond ! No ! we will stop the litany at villain, and go no lower in the scale. Ah ! bless me ! what have I said now ? as if lawyer were a viler term than villain ! What shall I do ? Oh ! help me out, friend Raymond—do now !"

Herbert, when Grace first turned away from him to speak to Mr. Vincent, had resumed his seat with an offended air ; and up to the moment of being directly appealed to, had apparently been busy upon a legal document which lay spread out before him. He had not been so attentive to legal matters, however, as to miss a single word of the colloquy—though not till the mention of his name did he raise his eyes from the manuscript on the table.

“What can I do to serve you, Miss De Vere?” he now said, in reply to Grace, looking her steadily in the eye, and speaking in a cool, quiet, business-like tone.

“Help me out of a scrape!” cried Grace, gaily—though with a slight air of embarrassment—such as any one will naturally experience in attempting to joke with a person who seems to view everything in a matter-of-fact light.

“Please state your case!” said Herbert, drily.

“Heavens! the affair grows serious! and has a smell of the court!” replied Grace, putting on a long, sober face. “Why, you see, so please your Honor, that——”

“I see you are disposed to make sport of me, Miss De Vere!” interrupted Herbert, with an angry flush.

“Oh, not at all!” laughed Grace; “but when you put on such a magisterial air, you ought not to expect one to do less than use the formal etiquette which pertains to the Bench. However, as I see you are not disposed to joke with me, perhaps you will tell me, seriously, why you have not called at my house of late?”

“I have been very busy, for one thing,” replied Her-

bert, softening his tone, and assuming a less frigid air.

"How very industrious! Now for reason number two?"

"I thought it more than likely you had better company than my ungainly self, to amuse and interest you."

"How very modest! Now for reason number three?"

"I do not care to meet certain parties who are in the habit of visiting there."

"How very cautious! Now for reason number four?"

"I do not think it necessary to give any more reasons!" said Herbert.

"How very satisfactory!" returned Grace, biting her lips.

She stood for some moments, looking him steadily in the eye; and then added, in a cool, measured tone:

"Heretofore, Mr. Raymond, whenever you have called on me, I have found pleasure in endeavoring to make your visits agreeable to yourself, as I frankly admit they were to me; and should you again deign to honor me with your presence, I trust you will not find me disposed to treat you with less civility and politeness; but I beg you to understand, sir, that I do not wish you to call any oftener than may suit your own convenience and inclination! Allow me to wish you good morning!"

As she ceased speaking, she made a dignified bow, turned quickly on her heel, and passed over to the window; while Herbert, astonished and confused, stammered forth:

"Miss De Vere—I—really—if—if I have offended you—and—and—just like me—I know I have—I crave your forgiveness! and assure you—it was not done—intentionally!"

"Oh, very well, I accept your apology!" answered Grace, in a light, careless tone, without even turning round. "Oh, Papa Vincent!" she merrily exclaimed, in the very next breath—"do look at poor Mark. There he sits, on his own pompous gray, holding little bonny black Bess, and looking for all the world as if he wished equestrianism, on a hot summer's day, had not been voted among the pleasures of human life, by an angel worth twenty thousand a year! Bless me! how warm he seems!"

"And *is*, Miss Grace—'pon honor!" responded Mark, who overheard her remarks.

"You will not complain of my treating you *coldly* this time—will you, Marky, dear?"

"If you will only come to my relief now, I will never complain of you again, on any score!" said Mark, wiping the perspiration from his forehead. "If I had known you were going to be so long inside there, I would have hired a substitute to hold these animals."

"Indeed you would not!" returned Grace; "as if I would allow any common fellow to hold bonny black Bess! Umph! my dear sir!" she continued, affecting to be a little angry—"I wish you to consider bonny black Bess my representative—my proxy—my other self! and any slight shown to her will be duly resented by your very humble servant. If you resign her to the care of any one but her mistress, you resign me, and all the golden hopes and dreams which your

fancy has clustered around your ardent aspirations ! There is something for your little head to think about !” she added, *sotto voce*, as she drew back from the window, to indulge in a fresh burst of merriment, which she took care to so restrain as not to be heard by the poor victim of her whim.

“ I will not resign bonny black Bess till you come, or I melt away from her—but, in the name of suffering humanity, do not be long !” cried the voice of Mark Wellsford from the street.

“ Ah ! Grace ! Grace !” said Mr. Vincent, shaking his head reprovingly—but unable, for the life of him, to put on a serious face.

“ Let him swelter !” laughed Grace—“ it will do him good ! The next time he finds me treating him coldly, he will the better appreciate it ; and an iceberg, just now, would be a delight to him ! But come !” she pursued, with a more serious air—“ I am neglecting my business, and consuming your valuable time—and you lawyers are so very *industrious* !” and she glanced meaningly at Herbert, who had seriously resumed his occupation at the table, apparently taking no further notice of anything that was being said.

“ What is it ?” inquired the lawyer. And then approaching Grace, and glancing at Herbert, he added, in a low, confidential tone : “ He is a noble fellow, my child ! and worth more than a thousand such frippery, fashionable fools as are courting your favor with an eye to your wealth ! Pray speak to him kindly ! for a heart like his is not to be despised ! He does not exactly understand you—for he is too honest and straight-forward—too matter-of-fact, if you will—to appreciate anything like a jest.”

Grace listened quietly to Mr. Vincent's remarks ; but save looking unusually serious, and turning slightly pale, she betrayed no emotion. She did not reply to his volunteered observations, but only to his first question.

"I want a thousand dollars !" she said.

Mr. Vincent looked at her gravely for a moment ; and then silently turning to his desk, he took down his check-book, and proceeded to fill out a blank to her order for the amount.

While he was thus engaged, voices were heard outside, and the quick ear of Grace soon detected the mention of her own name. She went to the window, and saw Mark Wellsford in conversation with Leon Dupree. She drew back quickly, somewhat flushed and excited ; and a minute after, just as Mr. Vincent was in the act of handing her the check, Leon Dupree appeared at the door. He caught the eye of the lawyer, and knew at once, by its glance, that he was regarded by him as an unwelcome intruder ; but, nothing daunted or abashed, he said, with a *nonchalant* air, touching his hat and making a slight inclination of his head :

"Mr. Vincent, your most obedient."

And as the lawyer bowed stiffly in return, Leon walked up to Grace, with a polite familiarity, removed his hat, took her hand, and said, very blandly and cordially :

"Miss Grace, I am very happy to meet you ! quite an unexpected pleasure, I assure you ! How have you been since I saw you last ?"

"Never better !" laughed Grace—resuming, at least to all appearance, her wonted gay mood. "You have been away, I understand ?"

"Yes, Miss Grace, I have had what some people would call a pleasant trip into the country; but I was glad to get back, I assure you; and henceforth I shall, as I always have done, vote the country a bore."

We may remark, *en passant*, that Leon had left the city with Marie Souloni, in pursuance of his plan to get rid of her for a time, as made known in a previous chapter. He had escorted her to a small village at the foot of the Alleghanies; and, after providing for her sojourn there until his return, had taken leave of her, ostensibly to prosecute his journey to the West, but in reality to hasten back and carry out his dark scheme against the peace and happiness of Villeta Linden. And he was even now on his way to visit Mrs. Leslie for this sinister purpose; but, encountering Mark Wellsford quite unexpectedly, and learning that Grace De Vere was in lawyer Vincent's office, he felt compelled by his policy to pay his respects to her—for she was a lady worth twenty thousand per year, whose hand was the bright, glorious star of his ambition.

"When did you return?" inquired Grace.

"Late last evening; and early this morning I did myself the honor to call at your mansion, where I learned, much to my regret, of your temporary absence."

"Why, bless me! did you wish it permanent?" laughed Grace. And then added: "Have you anything in particular to communicate, now you have found me?"

"Nothing of moment—though it would have afforded me much happiness to have had a short *tête-à-tête* with one whom I consider the most charming of her sex!"

This was said in a low tone—but Grace replied, with her usual gay laugh :

“ Of course a short *tête-à-tête* with a lady so surpassingly charming as myself, would have put so gallant a gentleman as Leon Dupree in ecstasies : I know this—pray tell me something I do not know !”

“ Ah ! Miss Grace—if you only knew how much I adore you !”

“ Why, of course I know it—have you not told me at least twenty times ?”

“ But you do not believe me !”

“ Indeed I do ! How could it be otherwise ? Do you think me ignorant of my own fascinations ?”

“ When will you do me the honor to accompany me to Serley’s, to look at his last beautiful painting ?” inquired Leon, concealing the vexation he felt at finding all his blandishments literally thrown away upon the eccentric Grace.

“ Why, for that matter, I am at your service now,” she replied.

“ But I do not care to go in company with Mark.”

“ Oh, he is easily disposed of !” laughed Grace : “ I will send him to the bank with this check ; and he will only be too glad to give up his horse and get out of his misery.”

She turned as she spoke, caught up a pen, and dashed her name across the back of the check ; and then, taking the arm of Leon, she left the office, merely saying :

“ Good-by, papa, till I see you again.”

“ Ah ! Grace !” mused the lawyer, looking after her, and shaking his head ; “ you are an enigma, which, with all my experience in human nature, I am unable to solve.”

"One thing is certain, Mr. Vincent," said Herbert, leaning back in his chair, and looking pale and troubled—"she cares no more for me than she does for a circus clown: both may serve to amuse her for a moment, and then be forgotten."

"I do not know what to think of her!" was the reply of the lawyer; and there the subject dropped for the time.

"Come, Marky, dear," said Grace, as she reached the side of that gentleman; "I will take pity on you for once. Please lend Mr. Dupree your horse, and run down to the bank with this check—that is a good little fellow!"

"But I prefer to accompany you, notwithstanding the heat," replied Mark.

"Please do as you are bid!" said Grace; "or I shall have to punish you, by depriving you of my charming company hereafter!"

Mark Wellsford made no further objection, but dismounted at once, and handed the reins to Leon Dupree, who assisted Grace into the saddle, and then mounted the grey and rode off by her side.

"Well," grumbled Mark, as he stood and watched the parties out of sight, "I wonder if nature intended me for a fool! it seems I play the part very well. Upon my word, this is cool enough for any weather! But just wait, Miss Grace, till I get a legal claim to be your master! and then we will see who will lord it with an air! I am all obedience now," he added, as he looked at the check, and set off to get it cashed; "but wait a little, my gay lady, and perhaps it will be my turn to dictate!"

As for Leon Dupree, he fancied he had achieved a

great triumph in so unexpectedly getting the place of his rival by the side of Grace; and he strove, with all the soft blandishments of which he was master, to turn it to account; but Grace had suddenly taken a sulky whim, and would make no response to his fine speeches. He knew, however, she was passionately fond of the fine-arts, and looked upon a superior artist as a superior being; and he hoped, by a little ruse of his own, of which we gave a slight inkling in his interview with Julian St. Cloud, to put the *coup de grace* to his suit—for he flattered himself that he was, with the exception of Mark Wellsford, the most favored suitor of the rich heiress.

In his present design, we may say in brief, he was so far successful as to get Grace into the studio of Julian St. Cloud, as if by mistake; and once there, he adroitly managed to remain, till the artist informed him by a glance that he had scanned her features sufficiently for his purpose. On returning to the street, Grace said :

“As you have made one mistake, Mr. Dupree, it is just possible you may make another.”

“What do you mean?” inquired Leon, coloring—for he almost fancied she had seen through his design.

“Suppose you go up to Serley’s studio, and be sure you are right—for I am not in the mood to be trotting up and down stairs for nothing !”

“Oh, certainly, Miss Grace—anything to oblige you!” returned Leon, greatly relieved: “I will be back in a minute;” and, hastening to the right entrance, he disappeared.

The moment he was out of sight, Grace flew to her palfrey, jerked loose the rein by which he was tied to

an awning-post, sprung lightly into the saddle, and dashed swiftly down the street.

"Heaven be praised!" she muttered, as she turned the first corner and pursued her way southward—"I have for the time being got rid of two incumbrances—one fool and one knave!" and then, as she pictured to herself the astonishment of Leon on finding she had suddenly and mysteriously disappeared, she fairly laughed aloud.

But her laugh was of short duration; and then a mingled expression of gloom and vexation gradually settled upon her features.

"The world thinks me happy—that my gayety comes from my heart!" she pursued, as she continued her course southward, with unabated speed, passing one street after another, and attracting the notice of hundreds as she rode along: "Yes, the world thinks me happy, because the world judges by appearances—but how often appearances are false! Ah, me!" she sighed—"to think that he, to whom of all others I would most freely give my hand and my heart—to think that he should misunderstand me, misconstrue my motives, perhaps despise me! Well," she continued, compressing her lips, while her eyes flashed with a stern, determined pride, "if he cares not for me, let him go! or if he be too wilfully blind to see, let him go! I shall not bend and sue, like a cringing sycophant—not I! On, Bess!" she continued, striking her palfrey a smart blow with her riding-whip: "on, my nimble beast! Go as fast as you may, you cannot keep pace with my thoughts!"

And on Grace sped, under a hot, summer's sun, till, far beyond the limits of the city, she at last drew rein,

and brought her panting and foaming beast to a halt beneath the cooling shade of a gigantic old tree. To Grace De Vere, there was something delightful in this change. The day was fine, though warm—the air clear and pure—and she experienced a new pleasure in being alone with nature, where, undisturbed by a fellow creature, she could freely commune with her own heart.

Tying her palfrey to a limb of the noble old tree, she threw herself upon the soft, green turf, beneath its shade, and listened to the music of rustling leaves, and humming bees, and singing birds—and thought, and hoped, and dreamed for many an hour. Then she took a ramble through the open fields, gathered a few wild flowers for pastime, and fondly lingered, enchanted with the quiet, dreamy beauty of the scene, till the declining sun, with the long shadows stretching eastward, warned her that night was drawing on apace, and that she must leave the world of nature to return to the world of fashion, art, and folly.

But determined to enjoy till the latest moment the fascination of the rural scene, she ambled down toward the broad, placid Delaware, till she got a view of its glistening waters, and the white sails of the many moving vessels and boats which dotted its surface; and when she entered the southern limits of the settled portion of the great city, the bright sun was just sinking in a bed of crimson and gold.

But after a day so unexpectedly passed in quiet enjoyment, it was the fortune of Grace De Vere, ere she reached her own splendid home, to be a witness of, and become an actor in, one scene of human misery, where every emotion of her noble heart was

strongly stirred by events of the gravest importance to many of those who figure in our drama of life.

Of this, however, anon.

CHAPTER XIV.

THE SCHEMER BEGINS HIS WORK.

GREAT was the surprise and chagrin of Leon Dupree, when, returning from the studio of the artist, he discovered that Grace and her palfrey were gone.

"Can it be her design to insult me?" he muttered.

But he had too good an opinion of himself to seriously suppose she meant to put a slight upon him, and so he came to the conclusion it was merely one of her mad pranks.

"Doubtless she intends to have a laugh at my expense!" he soliloquized. "Well, let her laugh—and let him laugh loudest who wins! My purpose is accomplished—St. Cloud has seen her—and, for the rest, I have work enough on hand to keep me busy. Now then for my plot, which was interrupted by meeting her so unexpectedly! Marie is gone, and Villeta must take her place! The brother alone seems to be in the way—and *the brother must die!* Nature is dragging him down by degrees—keeping him in misery—and Nature must be stimulated to perform her work quickly! My plan, I am almost certain, will succeed—nay, it *must* succeed!"

While these dark thoughts were passing through his scheming brain, he untied the horse of Mark Wellsford, sprung into the saddle, and rode him to the house of his owner.

"Tell your master," he said to the groom, as he dismounted and gave the beast into his charge, "that I am much obliged for the use of this noble animal, though I found it rather warm riding."

He turned away, walked quickly down the street, and, in something less than an hour, was ringing the bell at the house of Mrs. Leslie.

"Is your mistress at home?" he inquired of a colored domestic who opened the door.

"No, sah—she's gwine out."

"She will be in soon, I suppose?"

"Doesn't know sartain, sah—but guess she will."

"At any rate," said Leon, "I will step in and wait awhile."

"Yes, sah!" rejoined the woman, a full blooded negress, advanced in years, who looked at him very hard, and seemed doubtful about the propriety of admitting him. "Is you 'quainted with missus, sah?" she inquired.

"Why, don't you know me? or are you a new comer here?"

"I's come here day before yesterday, sah."

"Ah! that accounts for it! Yes, I am an old friend of Mrs. Leslie, and my name is——"

Leon paused, undecided whether to say Dupree or Warren; and, just at the moment, his eye chanced upon the mistress herself, coming hastily down the street.

"Ah! Mr. Warren," she said, gaily, as she came

up, taking his hand—"welcome back, sir! When did you arrive in town?"

"Late last night, dear madam."

"Well, in, in, for mercy's sake! I shall melt in this heat;" and she hastily led the way herself into the parlor. "Sit down, Mr. Warren, and make yourself at home, while I take off this love of a bonnet, before I ruin it! Dear me! if I painted like some of the young ladies I know, I should have a sorry face to look at in this heat!"

"Fortunately, my dear madam, you are one of those rare beauties which art cannot adorn!" said Leon, with a winning smile.

"Now what, in the name of all the saints, can I do for you?" said Mrs. Leslie, as she faced round from the mirror, with her bonnet in her hand, and a quizzical smile upon her fine, handsome countenance.

"Deuce take it, madam! cannot I pay a compliment without a selfish motive?" returned Leon, pettishly.

"And cannot I joke without being thought in earnest?" laughed the other. "But tell me—how is Marie? and where did you leave her?"

"I left her well, and in very comfortable quarters," answered Leon, who never made a confident of any one without a strong motive for doing so.

"I suppose you had quite a scene at parting?"

"She shed some tears, of course—but, on the whole, bore up quite bravely—better, in fact, than I expected."

"And even now, I suppose, she is fancying you exposed to the perils of the Far West?"

"Doubtless!" smiled Leon—a cold, cynical smile,

not unlike that of his father; "and I trust she will keep on fancying for some time to come. By-the-by, have you seen Villeta?"

"Not I," answered Mrs. Leslie; "you were to give me due notice when to call and make her acquaintance."

"Well, I would have you see her this very afternoon; and you must persuade her to come and look at your house, that she may judge how it will suit her for a home, in the event of her being left alone in the world."

"I will call upon her," replied Mrs. Leslie; "and of course will do my best to bring her home with me."

"I believe, when you set your heart upon a purpose you never fail?" said Leon, looking her steadily in the eye.

"Seldom," smiled Mrs. Leslie.

"Then I shall expect you to succeed in your endeavors to bring Villeta home with you; and I would like you to so time your visit, that she will be here just at the hour of tea; and then of course you will not let her depart without partaking of your hospitality. I have an object in view," he added, as he perceived, from the look of Mrs. Leslie, that she suspected something of the kind: "I hope to join you at the evening meal, and have a pleasant walk home with her."

"Ah! that indeed?"

"Yes, that is my purpose; but in case anything should happen to prevent my being here at the proper time for her return, will you have the kindness to see her home?"

"Certainly, sir ; but are we not reckoning without our host ?"

"How so ?"

"You are counting for a certainty upon my persuasive powers, and I may fail in inducing her to come home with me."

"You are a distant relative of Mr. Warren, who has proved himself her friend in need," smiled Leon ; "and her gratitude, to say the least, will debar her from making a positive refusal to so simple a request as a walk home with you the distance of some half-a-dozen squares, especially if she is allowed to perceive that such a refusal will wound and disappoint you ! You understand me ?"

"Perfectly, I think."

"Of course you can say whatever you think best in praise of Mr. Warren—being careful, at the same time, to exercise such discretion as will conceal the fact of your having a design in your remarks."

"Trust a woman of my experience for managing a delicate matter so as not to be suspected of an improper motive !" returned Mrs. Leslie, with a smile of assurance.

And she added, mentally :

"Ay, trust me for deceiving even as great an adept in villany as your scheming self !"

"I am passionately in love with this girl," pursued Dupree ; "and I will freely give a large sum to any one who will, by any means, excite in her a corresponding passion for myself ! My dear Mrs. Leslie, I know you possess superior judgment, tact, and management—not to speak of your many other enviable abilities—and I want you to become enlisted, heart

and soul, in my behalf! Only bring this girl to love me, as I wish to be loved, and you shall have no cause to complain of my want of liberality!"

"Rest assured I will do my best, Mr. Dupree—or rather, let me say, Mr. Warren—since by that name I must address you in her presence."

"Yes, you had better accustom yourself to calling me Mr. Warren henceforth—since a single mistake in the hearing of Villeta Linden, might entirely destroy our plans in regard to her. By-the-by, you have changed your servant, I perceive—and I was in a quandary as to which name to give at the moment I espied you."

"Yes," said Mrs. Leslie, "as you are to be known by the name of Warren, I thought it as well to have none in the house who might possibly make an unfortunate mistake."

"Very clever in you, indeed!" smiled Leon; "and I am happy to know my case is in the hands of one who is too shrewd and cautious to require any further instructions from me. You will call upon Villeta this afternoon?"

"I will. By-the-way, what is our relationship?"

"Let me see!" mused Dupree. "Well, suppose we say you are a cousin of my mother?"

"Very good."

"Do not fail to bring Villeta home with you, and detain her to tea!"

"I will do my best."

"And your best will succeed," smiled Leon. "Here!" he added, drawing forth his pocket-book, and handing Mrs. Leslie a couple of bank-notes, of fifty dollars each—"accept this trifle as an earnest of a proper recompense at a no distant period!"

"Parsimony is not one of your sins," said Mrs. Leslie, as she took the money.

"I flatter myself I have always adhered to the rule, to pay well those who serve me well!" replied Leon.

After some further conversation, Leon Dupree took leave of Mrs. Leslie, well pleased with the progress he had made in his dark design.

Having some hours upon his hands, he now repaired to the club-house, where we met him in an early chapter of our story, ordered dinner, and drank a bottle of wine, to brace his nerves and raise his spirits, that he might be prepared for his own dark part at the proper moment. He then joined a party in a game of cards, and gambled till near sundown, drinking freely. At last he started up somewhat suddenly, looked at his watch, muttered something about an engagement, and hurried forth into the street. His face was now unusually pale, his lips compressed, and his brow sternly knitted—all denoting great internal excitement, united with an inflexible determination to execute his dark design.

"It must be done!" he said, mentally, as he hastened down the street; "it is folly to wait the slow course of nature; and the proceeding, at the worst, will only shorten suffering, and therefore cannot, *per se*, be criminal. It requires nerve to perform my part, and be a witness of the scene that will follow—but the hope of the reward shall keep me firm to my purpose. Yes, I *will* be firm, come what come may! This mad passion grows upon me—it even now burns in my veins—Vileta must be mine! and if my plan prove not a failure, then he who stands in my path, Lionel Linden, shall soon be in the Land of Shadows!"

As Leon hastened down the street, too much occupied with his own thoughts to notice those he met and passed, a boy followed him. This boy, apparently between ten and fifteen years of age, was small and slender, had bright, black eyes, a pretty face, a very dark complexion, and short, curly, black hair. He was neatly dressed, in a suit of dark blue, and had the delicate look and air of one genteelly bred. For hours he had been sauntering up and down the street, in the vicinity of the club-house; but the moment Leon Dupree came forth and hurried away, he turned and followed him.

Who was this boy? and why did he follow Leon Dupree?

CHAPTER XV.

BROTHER AND SISTER.

LIONEL LINDEN was reclining on the lounge by the open window, and Villeta was seated in a chair by his side. She had just returned from a visit to the old shop of Isaac Jacobs, and another of his craft, and she held in her hand the gold locket and necklace which she had put in pawn on the night we first introduced her to the reader; and besides these, a couple of rings, an enameled brooch, a silver watch, a set of silver tea-spoons, and a couple of silver pencils, which had previously been deposited as securities for small loans at another place.

"Thanks to our noble friend, Mr. Warren, we have

recalled some old and valued friends!" said Lionel, with a wan smile. "It really makes my heart glad to look upon them once more—for their very return brings hope."

"Oh! if they could only bring health to you," said Villeta, "my heart would be glad indeed! But you feel better, dear brother, do you not?"

"I certainly feel less depressed in spirits, since I have seen a way opened to you to live, sweet sister!" he replied. "I do not wish to hold out the hope that I shall ever get well; but, I do assure you, I feel much more resigned to the will of God, than when I contemplated leaving you in the two-fold misery of grief and want. Mr. Warren has taken a heavy weight from my heart, by his solemn assurance that, let what will happen to me, he will ever be a true friend to you. By-the-by, how is it that he has not called since he took away your story, Villeta? I hope you did not offend him!"

"You know he said he was going to be absent from the city for a few days!" answered Villeta, with a heightened color.

"Oh, yes—I remember now!" rejoined Lionel. "But it seemed to me, dear sister, that, during his last visit, your manner was rather restrained and distant. Was such the case? or did I fancy it?"

"I certainly endeavoured to treat him with all due politeness," replied Villeta, evasively; "and if I did not, I am not aware of it."

"Ah! he is a noble friend, sweet sister, and it would grieve me to have any coldness spring up between you. He appreciates your noble qualities and talents—seems eager to serve you—and, between you and me,

I fancy he harbors for you a warmer feeling than even friendship."

"Why do you think so, dear Lionel?" inquired Villeta, coloring deeply.

She had not mentioned to her brother anything concerning that avowal of love which had been made during his sleep; and though Leon had called once since—the night previous to his departure for the country, at which time he had taken the manuscript of her story and paid her the balance agreed upon—he had made no allusion to any conversation of which Lionel was not cognizant—so that the idea which the latter had begun to entertain, was in fact founded wholly upon conjecture.

"Why do I think so?" repeated Lionel. "Why, witness that beautiful painting—that gem of art!"

"Which proves him an artist of genius," said Villeta, quietly.

"But could he paint so perfect a likeness in your absence, if every lineament and expression were not impressed upon his very soul! and can he carry your sweet image there and fail to love you?"

"You think—he—he—loves me then?"

"I am almost sure of it, Villeta."

"And are you pleased with the thought, dear brother?"

"Why, he seems a high-spirited, noble gentleman—has talent and means—and, ere long, you may stand in need of a sincere friend and protector—one who can shield your gentle, sensitive spirit from the crushing miseries of desolation and poverty—from the rude jars and discords of an inharmonious world! Oh! Villeta, if it be true that you have inspired him with

that most sacred and holy of all human emotions—a pure, unselfish love—and your own true heart can congenially respond to——”

“But it cannot, dear brother!” interrupted Villeta, in a quick, excited tone. “I know little of love, Lionel; but if it be the yearning of the soul for the constant presence of one who seems the all-in-all of existence—to make whom happy every thought and aspiration of the inner spirit bends in earnest, humble, holy devotion, and, through its worship of the creature, ascends in gratitude to the Creator—then I have no love for him you name! Mr. Warren has been very kind to us in our distress; he has acted a noble and friendly part; he has alleviated our misery; he has cheered your drooping spirit; he has taught us to feel we are not all forsaken of our fellows—that there is human sympathy, perhaps unselfish kindness; and for all these my soul thanks him; and his peace, prosperity, and happiness are besought in my prayers: but I do not and cannot regard him with warmer feelings than those which belong to gratitude and friendship, and already have I experienced the pain of telling him so.”

“Of telling him so, Villeta?” said the brother, in surprise: “what do you mean?”

“I did not intend to mention the matter to you,” answered the sister, “for I thought it might trouble you; but as you have introduced the subject, it may be as well to keep it a secret no longer. On the night he first gave us money, and brought the painting, and while you were asleep, he took the opportunity to say, that the painting was the likeness of a being whom he loved, and then showed me that the likeness was my own.”

"And you told him you could never do more than esteem him as a friend?" inquired Lionel.

"I did."

"And he was not offended?"

"Apparently he was not. He called again the following night, you remember, and seemed more than ever anxious for our welfare, and urged upon us the propriety of removing to better quarters."

"Yes, I remember, he was very kind," said Lionel.

"If I did not treat him with the same natural frankness and ease," pursued Villeta, "it was because of the remembrance of what had passed between us, which forced upon me a certain restraint—but I really did not intend to be impolite, uncivil, or cold in my manner."

"And, on reflection, I do not think you were," rejoined Lionel; "but there was a change, which I could not fail to observe, and for which I could not account. And so I was right in my conjecture! and he really does love you!" added Lionel, musingly.

"I hope not," answered Villeta, with a troubled look.

"You hope not! and yet he told you so!" said Lionel, in a tone and with a look of surprise. "Do you then doubt his sincerity, Villeta?"

"I do not know what to think, dear brother!" replied Villeta, anxiously. "If his words came from his heart, I think he chose a strange time and opportunity to speak them. Let us change the subject, dear Lionel! I do not wish to think of what he said; for when I consider everything connected with that interview, I find myself inclined to question his sincerity, and doubts

may do him wrong. If indeed he was sincere, I regret being the innocent cause of a passion that can never be mutual; and if he was not sincere, it will give me pain to think him unworthy of my esteem."

"He was sincere, I have reason to believe," rejoined Lionel. "How could it be otherwise? for—and I say it without flattery, dear sister—you are a being calculated to inspire the heart of almost any one with the warm affections and unselfish devotion of the master passion—for you are young, beautiful, gifted, gentle, earnest, affectionate, devoted, truthful, and pure."

"Say something superhuman at once, dearest and blindest of brothers?" smiled Villeta, as she bent forward, threw her arm around his neck, and impressed upon his pale lips the holy kiss of a fond sister's love. "But let me tell you of the Jew," she added, resolved to change the subject, and draw the thoughts of her brother into another channel. "Indeed he seemed very much interested in me, too!" she continued, in a somewhat playful tone: "perhaps I inspired him with the master passion!"

"Whom do you mean?" asked Lionel.

"Why, the Jew who was so liberal as to loan us three dollars on this locket and necklace."

"Well, what of him, Villeta?"

"Why, he asked me so many questions! When I first went to him, you remember, he inquired so particularly about our dear father; and this time about our dear mother, and about you, and about myself, and how we lived, and if we had any relations in this country, and so forth, and so on."

"What was all this to him?" said Lionel: "he must have had some motive!"

“He said he remembered reading accounts of the mysterious disappearance of our dear father, but had never brought himself to believe the vile reports against his honor and integrity, for he knew men who had known him, and all had spoken of him in the highest terms of commendation, and he felt deeply interested in a family who had been so wronged and slandered.”

“And you answered all his questions?”

“As well as I could, dear brother,” replied Villeta. And she immediately added, as if from sudden recollection: “Oh, yes—and he wished to know where our parents were married, and when, and if I knew who married them, and who were present at the wedding, and so on.”

“Strange kind of questions!” said Lionel: “surely he must have had some motive beyond mere curiosity!”

“I think not,” replied Villeta. “He is a very old man, and in his second childhood; and old people, you know, brother, have simple whims to gratify.”

“And what did you tell him about the marriage?”

“Not much—and for the best of reasons—I do not know much. I told him I believed they were married in the city of New York, in the year 1810; but who married them I could not say—nor who were present—nor of course whether any of the parties are still living.”

“Depend upon it he had some motive besides mere curiosity!” said Lionel.

“Do you think so, brother? But what motive?”

“I do not know, I am sure,” he answered. And then added, with a feeble smile, which played over his

pale, wasted features like a gleam of sunlight over a sepulchre: "Perhaps he had indeed fallen in love with you, and so wished to prolong the conversation!"

"I think that must be it!" laughed Villeta; "but, if so, his at least will be a hopeless passion. Hark! is not that some one coming up stairs? Yes! there is a knock!"

Villeta started up as she spoke, hastily put away her jewels, and went to the door. To her surprise, she found herself confronted with a fair, good-looking lady of forty, very tastefully and elegantly attired.

CHAPTER XVI.

A FRIEND IN NEED.

"HAVE I the pleasure of addressing Miss Villeta Linden?" inquired the strange lady, in a bland tone, and with a winning smile.

"That is my name, madam," replied Villeta, modestly, with just sufficient color to heighten her beauty.

"Pardon me," pursued the visitor, "if I seem intrusive; but I presume you are acquainted with a gentleman of the name of Warren?"

"Mr. Warren has honored us with several visits of late, and has indeed been very kind," answered Villeta, with the same slight embarrassment. "Pray, madam, will you walk in and be seated?"

"Thank you!" said the lady, as she quietly entered the apartment and bowed to Lionel: "It is

with pleasure I embrace the opportunity to make the acquaintance of two individuals of whom I have heard my kinsman, Henry Warren, speak in such glowing terms, and of whom I think I have some knowledge which dates anterior to his. My name is Leslie."

"You are then the lady of whom we also have heard Mr. Warren speak in glowing terms!" rejoined Villeta: "I am very happy to make your acquaintance!"

"My dear child," rejoined Mrs. Leslie, gazing earnestly and admiringly upon the sweet, ingenuous face of the lovely being before her, and speaking in a tone of some emotion; "God forbid you ever have cause to regret the hour in which for the first time you behold the features of your mother's early friend and companion!"

"My mother's early friend and companion!" exclaimed Villeta, with a look of amazement, while Lionel gave a start of surprise. "You, madam? you our dear mother's early friend?"

"Yes, even I, my dear child—Margaret Leslie—once Margaret Colonnell—was, in years gone by, the bosom companion of sweet Ellen Courtney."

"Margaret Colonnell!" cried both Lionel and Villeta in the same breath.

"You have heard the name before, then?"

"Oh! yes! yes!—often—often have we heard our dear mother speak of Margaret Colonnell, and wonder if she were living or dead!" cried Villeta, excitedly.

"And you are really Margaret Colonnell?"

"I am, Miss Linden."

"Oh! let me embrace you, as our dear mother would do if she were living!" rejoined Villeta, spring-

ing forward and throwing her arms around the neck of Mrs. Leslie—who, as she returned the embrace of the pure, innocent girl, burst into tears.

“And permit me to grasp the hand of our dear mother’s early friend!” said Lionel, in a choking voice, as he arose, and, with feeble step, advanced to Mrs. Leslie. “It is such a rare sight to us to behold the face of a friend!” he added, with tearful eyes, as his thin, transparent hand closed nervously upon hers.

“Ah! poor orphans! would to God I had found you sooner!” said Mrs. Leslie, in a choking voice.

“Lionel! dear Lionel! dear brother! beware of this excitement!” exclaimed Villeta, in alarm, as she turned and anxiously gazed upon his thin, hollow, ghastly features, now quivering with a newly awakened emotion. “Better lie down on the bed, dear brother, and compose yourself!”

“I will,” he said, faintly—“for I find I am very weak.”

Villeta and Mrs. Leslie assisted him upon the bed, where, for some minutes, he remained quiet, completely exhausted with the unusual effort he had made to give his mother’s early friend a cordial greeting.

“Doubtless you think it very strange,” said Mrs. Leslie to Villeta, as she drew her aside and resumed the conversation in a more quiet tone, “that your poor, dear mother lost all trace of one to whom she was a true friend in youth, and whom, I have reason to suppose, she ever held in affectionate remembrance!”

“Oh! she did indeed love you, dear madam!” responded Villeta, warmly; “and many is the time I have heard her speak of Margaret Colonnell, and wonder if she were living; but she came at last to think you

were no more of this world—for she argued, if you were living, you would certainly write to her.”

“And—and—she really knew not what had become of me?” inquired Mrs. Leslie, turning pale and appearing much agitated.

“She did not indeed.”

“Did she ever tell you anything of my history?”

“All I remember of her saying was, that—”

“Well, speak out!” said Mrs. Leslie, as Villeta suddenly paused, in some confusion.

“You will not be offended, my dear madam?”

“No, indeed, my sweet girl!”

“She said you were a foundling!” rejoined Villeta.

“That is true!” sighed the other—“I never knew father or mother. But what did she say of my going away from the family with whom I lived?”

“I only remember hearing her say you were not treated well, and that you suddenly disappeared, and no trace of you could be found afterward.”

“Then no one really knew what had become of me!” said Mrs. Leslie, inquiringly.

“No one, so far as I could understand.”

Mrs. Leslie seemed much relieved by this answer; and after a short pause, she resumed:

“I will make all the addition in the history of myself that will be of any immediate interest to you, Miss Linden.”

“Pray call me Villeta!” said the other: “Miss Linden is too formal an appellation to come from the lips of a dear friend of my dear mother.”

“Ah! sweet girl, you make me love you!” cried Mrs. Leslie, catching Villeta to her bosom; “and this is the happiest moment I have experienced for many

a long year. You must pardon these tears—they are tears of happiness!" she added, in a low, tremulous voice, hiding her face in her handkerchief. "Ah! you weep too, poor girl! and you, too, have experienced the bitterness of a lonely, desolate life—a life without the sympathy of congenial friends! Oh! that I had sought and found you sooner! but there were reasons——"

She stopped, dried her eyes hastily, and resumed, as if anxious to turn the conversation:

"I was about to tell you something of my history, Villeta; and I will also tell you something of your mother—which, though it may not be new to you, will at least prove that I am no impostor."

"Oh! dear madam, do not for a moment suppose I harbor so base a thought!" replied Villeta.

"I do not, my child! I can see, in your clear eye and sweet face, that you are innocence itself—and the pure and innocent are seldom suspicious; but still this is, in many respects, a bad world; and the confiding and trusting are often deceived—as, alas! I know too well.

"Your mother, Villeta, was born in Dover, and her father was at one time a wealthy merchant. When I knew Ellen Courtney, she was a lovely girl—younger than yourself, and equally as beautiful—and she was then an heiress, whose society was courted by the opulent and fashionable. But she was not proud and haughty, as wealthy beauties too frequently are; she was all kindness, sweetness, and gentleness—and she did not disdain the companionship of one who was, so to speak, without name, or kindred, or friends—I mean my unworthy self. The family with whom I

lived, and who had brought me up from infancy—who had taken me from the foundling hospital, in fact—were near neighbors of her family, and visited back and forth; and Ellen, your mother, unlike the rest, treated me as an equal—for she saw, dear soul, how I was slighted by others—and I became her confidante and bosom friend. How I loved her, Villeta!—oh! how wildly, how madly, I loved her for this!”

Mrs. Leslie paused to wipe away a tear, and resumed:

“I was not in general treated well, even by the family with whom I lived; I was looked down upon as a poor foundling, and taught to feel my dependence; and this chafed my proud spirit—for I had a proud spirit, even then; and as I grew older, I resolved to break away from all restraint, and go, I knew not, cared not, whither. Unexpectedly my design was favored. I met, by accident, a gentleman—at least, I thought him such—who declared he had conceived a passion for me. I kept my secret, and, by appointment, we met again. He poured into my too willing ear a tale of love and devotion, and urged me to fly with him. I consented readily—for I then cared little what might become of me, so I should quit England forever. Our third meeting was on board of a vessel which bore us to the West Indies.

“Let me pass over years of trouble and suffering! Years after, in the fashionable thoroughfare of New York, I met Ellen Courtney, leaning on the arm of a noble-looking gentleman. Surprised, startled, and agitated by the most powerful emotions, I fortunately still retained sufficient presence of mind and power of will to drop my veil; but my brain reeled, and it was

only by a great effort I kept myself from sinking down at her feet. She did not see my face, however—knew not that I was near her—and passed on.”

“And why did you not speak to her?” cried Villeta. “Oh! it would have made her so happy! Surely, Mrs. Leslie, you do not think she had done you any wrong?”

“Oh! no, sweet, artless child—not she! but perhaps I had done myself wrong?”

“You certainly did wrong in not speaking to her!”

“Let that pass, Villeta; and, believe me, I did what I then thought for the best. In truth, I felt myself unworthy to approach a being so good and pure—and we never met again. I followed her, however, at a distance, and traced her to her home. I then set on foot inquiries, and learned more of her history. Her parents were dead: her mother had died in Dover: her father had failed in business, and, with her, had come to America, to perish here, almost in want; and Ellen herself was then the happy wife of your father, a merchant of some note.

“A few months after my unexpected meeting with your mother,” pursued Mrs. Leslie, “I left New York, and came to this city, and have resided here ever since. I heard no more of your parents, till, one morning, some five years ago, I was startled and shocked, by reading an account of the sudden disappearance of Eldridge Linden, coupled with a heavy bank robbery. I was not sure then that the Eldridge Linden mentioned was the husband of Ellen Courtney—for, till that moment, I had supposed him still in New York—but my heart misgave me, as the name

was the same—and the name, in its combination, was a most uncommon one."

"Yes," sobbed Villeta, "poor papa failed in business in New York; but we had friends then; and, through their influence, he secured the office of cashier in the —— Bank of this city. We had only been here about a year, and were beginning to feel prosperous and happy once more, when that terrible event plunged us into the very abyss of woe."

"And your dear mother!" said Mrs. Leslie, in a tremulous voice—"I wonder the blow did not kill her at once!"

"It crushed her!" sobbed Villeta; "but she lived, a sort of living death, for three years, and then her gentle spirit took its flight to a better world!"

"How I longed to seek her out, and come to her in her hour of heart desolation!" continued Mrs. Leslie; "for though not positively certain, I could not but believe that the Eldridge Linden, who had so mysteriously disappeared, was the husband of sweet Ellen Courtney; but the same reasons which had deterred me from speaking to her when we met in New York, still restrained me from doing what my feelings prompted. I did wrong in keeping back, I now humbly confess, and may God forgive me!"

Mrs. Leslie again hid her face for a moment, and then hastily added:

"After the excitement of that terrible affair died away, I heard no more of the family of Linden till quite recently, when I was startled at hearing Mr. Warren mention your name, with the request that I would call upon you. I am here now, and hope to make some atonement for the past! Villeta, you must leave this house and come and live with me!"

"I thank you for your kindness, dear madam!" said Villeta, with heightened color; "but our circumstances——"

"Nay," interrupted the other, warmly, "begin no form of denial, for I will accept of none! Money is not to be taken into consideration in a matter which so deeply concerns the heart as this does mine! I have means at present—and, while they remain, you shall not want! I am now living alone, and there is room in my dwelling for the children of sweet Ellen Courtney. Come! you shall even go with me now, and see how you like the place and the accommodations—it is but a step from here."

Villeta hesitated.

"To-morrow, perhaps——" she began.

"*Now!*" interrupted Mrs. Leslie, in a playful, positive tone. "You shall not ~~deny~~ me this pleasure, even though I be compelled to appeal to your brother."

"Go, sister, since our kind friend seems so anxious!" said Lionel.

"But I have already left you once to-day, dear brother!" rejoined Villeta.

"And what of that? I did not suffer in your absence. Of course Mrs. Leslie must not suppose I urge you to go for any mercenary motive!" he added; "but as she is desirous you should make a friendly visit to her dwelling, your doing so will afford her pleasure."

"You are right, Mr. Linden," said Mrs. Leslie, "and I thank you for your support of my proposal. Come, Villeta, you have no excuse now!" she added, playfully.

Thus urged, Villeta yielded assent to the proposition of her guest; and as she began to make her toilet for the street, Mrs. Leslie drew her chair up to the bed, and entered into conversation with the brother.

"How long have you been suffering?" she inquired, in a tone of sympathy.

"It is more than a year since I have been able to perform any labor," replied Lionel.

"And what was the cause of your disease?"

"I took cold, while working one day in the rain, assisting in storing some goods that were exposed on the wharf," he answered, with a deep sigh. "I might have got well of that perhaps, but I could not afford to be idle—for we had become much reduced—were poor in fact—and I could not bear the thought that my dear sister should become a slave of the needle; and so——"

"And so," joined in Villeta, completing the sentence for her brother, who seemed to speak with much difficulty—"against my advice, my will, my prayers, my entreaties, he returned to his hard labor, while unfit to go abroad, took more cold, lost health and strength, and is what you now behold—the sad wreck, alas! of Lionel Linden."

"And had I come to see you ere then, perhaps this had never been—God forgive me!" rejoined Mrs. Leslie, sadly and earnestly, and with deep self-reproach, as she mournfully gazed upon the solemn spectacle of a young man, in the very prime of manhood, slowly wasting away, and going down, as it were inch by inch, into the dark and silent tomb. "We cannot recall the past," she continued; "but the present is

ours—and, with God's help, I will atone for some of the errors of my life!"

Lionel made a sign for her to draw nearer; and raising himself on his elbow, he said, in a low, solemn tone, that did not reach the ear of Villeta:

"Mrs. Leslie, you say our mother was your friend, and that you would be a friend to us! Then when I am gone—and it will be soon—I feel that death is near—take care of my sweet sister! be to her a true friend, counsellor and protector! and she will love you, and God will reward you!"

"I will!" said Mrs. Leslie, in a choking voice, as she took his thin hand in hers, and gave it a gentle, earnest pressure: "I will, as I hope for mercy!"

"God bless you!" murmured Lionel, sinking back on the pillow; "I shall die easier now."

"Good-by!" said Mrs. Leslie, as she turned away to conceal her emotion: "I shall soon call upon you again, and do something more for your happiness."

"How do you feel now, dear Lionel?" inquired Villeta—as, prepared for her walk, she approached the bed, and bent tenderly over her dying brother.

"Happier than usual," he answered, with a faint smile.

"And I," she sighed, "am more depressed! I feel strangely—as if something were going to happen—I would rather not go."

"Go, sister, sweet sister, go—you must not give way to these foolish fancies!" said Lionel.

"Good-by, dear brother!" said Villeta, tenderly and sadly, as she pressed her trembling lips to his: "I will be back soon."

She turned, and hastened out of the room, and down the stairs—but at the bottom of the steps she stopped, as if she had forgotten something, and said, hastily :

“Excuse me, Mrs. Leslie—I will be back in a moment.”

With this she flew up to her room, pretended to look for something, and, again approaching the bed, said, anxiously and tenderly :

“Are you sure you feel quite as well as usual, dear brother?”

“Quite, my fond sister! and much happier—for we are not without friends.”

She bent over him, and looked fondly into his large, bright eyes, and upon his pale, wasted features; and then kissing him, again and again, she murmured :

“Good-by! and God bless you!”

“Good-by! and God bless you!” was his fervent response..

She walked to the door, and stopped, and looked back. His large, bright eyes were turned toward her, and a bright, happy smile rested calmly on his pale features. Villetta gazed for a moment, in sisterly fondness—smiled sweetly on him in return—kissed her hand in playful adieu—and disappeared from his sight.

Ah! little did she then think it was her last farewell!

She disappeared from his sight! Yes, from that mortal sight which should look upon her no more forever!

Why did she turn back, after first quitting the

chamber of her brother? Was it for another look from those fond eyes? for another kiss from those pale lips? for another affectionate word from that loving heart? for another smile from that noble soul? She had them all now—warm, fresh, and pure—in the innermost and holiest temple of her spirit! And she had the last that could ever be hers! Never again would those fond eyes gaze upon her! those pale lips kiss her! that loving heart speak to her! that noble soul smile upon her through its tabernacle of clay!

The sun was less than an hour above its glorious bed of crimson and gold, when Villeta left her own humble dwelling to visit the elegant abode of Mrs. Leslie. All was bright, and cheerful, and gay, to the heart that had happiness within. The sun had set, and twilight grey was creeping, like a mist, over the great city, when, with eager steps and palpitating heart, Villeta returned to her humble home.

An hour—but little more than an hour—an infinitesimal point in time—a nothing in eternity!

And yet, Great God, what a terrible thing is an hour, when the awful messengers of Thy will roll up to human view, from the inscrutable depths of Thy wisdom, the accomplishment of an inexorable Destiny!

CHAPTER XVII.

THE DEED IS DONE.

VILLETA had been gone some three quarters of an hour, the last golden rays of the setting sun were gilding the roofs, domes, cupolas and spires of the city, and Lionel was quietly reposing on his bed, musing upon death and eternity, when he was slightly startled by hearing a quick step upon the stairs, and the next moment Leon Dupree sprung into the room. His face was very pale, and he seemed to be laboring under intense excitement.

"Ah! Mr. Linden, are you alone?" he said, quickly, glancing eagerly about the apartment.

"I am, just at present—why do you ask?" replied Lionel, raising himself in bed, and looking anxiously at Leon.

"Your sister—Villeta—is she not here?" cried Leon, in a tone of alarm.

"No! she went out, a short time since, with your friend and ours—Mrs. Leslie!" answered Lionel, quickly, beginning to grow much excited.

"Oh! great Heaven!" exclaimed Leon, sinking down upon a chair, and covering his eyes with his hands.

"What is it?" gasped Lionel, putting his hand to his throat. "Great God! has anything happened?"

"Oh! I cannot, dare not, tell you!" rejoined Leon.

"Speak! oh! my God! speak!" cried Lionel—while his thin, wasted features grew more ghastly, his large, hollow eyes seemed almost starting from their sockets, and the blue veins on his forehead and temples began to swell and grow livid. "Speak!" he cried, springing from the bed, and grasping the arm of Leon with the strength of a strong man—the strength which the spirit, stimulated by the most powerful emotions, concentrated for the moment upon the worn-out muscles of the dying body it still inhabited. "Speak! I implore you! Villeta, my sister—my sweet sister—Villeta—what has happened to her?"

"Oh!" said Leon, looking up in alarm—real alarm this time—for those great, glaring eyes seemed burning down into his very soul—and there was something awful in the concentrated terror of that thin, ghastly face, with its swollen and livid veins almost bursting with the upward pressure of the anguished heart: "Oh! Mr. Linden—be calm—I beseech you!"

"Speak!" reiterated Lionel, in a husky, hollow voice, gripping the arm of Leon with the gripe of a vice. "My sister—Villeta—what of her? In God's name, I command you, speak!"

"I—I—fear she is—is killed!" stammered the young villain, hardly knowing himself what he said.

"Killed?" gasped Lionel.

"It might not have been her—there—be calm!" said Dupree, excitedly. "I only saw a lady, who looked like her, run over and picked up for dead."

Lionel stood for a moment, the picture of horror—his mouth ajar—his eyes almost bursting from their sockets—his breath suspended. Then there came a long, terrible, gasping, choking inhalation—his thin



hands convulsively clutched his heart and chest—and, half spinning round, he staggered forward, and pitched upon the bed, face downward.

“Oh! good God! what have I done!” exclaimed Leon, starting up and springing to him. “My dear friend,” he said, taking hold of him—“do not let this news excite you! it might not have been Villeta I saw.”

He turned him over as he spoke—there came a rushing, gurgling sound—and the next moment Leon beheld a large stream of blood gush from the lips of his victim, and spread its horrible crimson over the white ground of the bed. He started back in real horror—for he was as yet unfamiliar with the awful crime of murder; and this was murder he had done—murder in heart, if not in deed—and would so be recorded against him on the great scroll of eternity.

“Help! help!” he called, springing out of the room, and down the stairs, and bursting into an apartment on the lower floor, where a poor woman, with an infant in her arms, was busily plying her needle to procure the necessaries of life. “Quick!” he cried—“run up stairs! the young man has burst a blood-vessel, and I fear is dying! I will fly for a doctor!”

The woman started up in alarm, put her child on the floor, and hurried up the stairs; while Leon rushed out into the street, half bewildered and terrified at his own guilty deed.

As he darted from Churchyard Court into Fourth street, and turned northward, he suddenly encountered the boy, who, unknown to him, had followed him hither, and was now awaiting his reappearance. The youth was really startled at finding himself so un-

expectedly confronted with Leon Dupree; but with wonderful self-control, he commanded his feelings and his nerves, and the latter was too much excited to have noticed him even had he not done so.

"Boy! will you serve me?—say! will you serve me?" cried Leon, excitedly, thrusting his hand into his pocket, and producing several pieces of silver coin, which he almost forced into the hand of the youth. "There—take that—and run for the first physician you can find! and bring him to the first house on this court! Say a young man has ruptured a blood-vessel, and is not expected to live from one minute to another! If you get a physician here before I do, I will reward you handsomely. There! away! away!"

The boy took the money, and started up Fourth street on a run; and Leon, turning back, hastened down Fourth to Lombard, and down Lombard toward the Delaware. When near the river, he stopped, took out his handkerchief, and wiped the perspiration from his face; and then seating himself upon a stick of timber, he began to ruminate, and collect his thoughts, and prepare himself for whatever might follow.

"Well," he said, mentally, "the deed is done! and horribly done it was! I knew it would take nerve—but I was hardly prepared for that unearthly look of his! Ugh! my blood runs cold even now at the bare recollection! And then such a gripe as he had upon my poor arm! it pains me yet! By my soul! he terrified me so, that, repenting of my design, I would have saved him—only my tongue, more true to my purpose than my cursed nerves, blundered out the very words that were wanted to seal his doom.

Well, since I have gone so far, I hope it is safely over with him—for he would have died soon, and I have saved him a great deal of misery—but if ever I attempt to frighten another to death, may I be ——!

“Now then I must proceed so as to escape even suspicion!” pursued the plotting villain. “Let me see! Shall I go to Mrs. Leslie’s, and meet Villeta as if nothing had happened, and so walk home with her, and with her discover the awful truth? No, that will not do; for even should we find the brother dead—or too far gone to speak—the woman in the house, who saw me, might tell her I had been there before. Shall I then hurry to her, and say that, having called upon her brother, I found him laboring under great excitement, and that this excitement finally brought on a fit of coughing, during which he ruptured an artery? Ah! this is a good tale to tell, providing Lionel does not live long enough to contradict it; but I need not tell it prematurely to Villeta, and be a witness of her first paroxysms of grief! No, there is no need of that—and Heaven knows I have seen enough of horrors for the present! Ah! I have it! I will remain here till dark—which is not far off—and then I will cautiously return, ascertain how matters are, and be guided by circumstances. Yes, this is the best I can do. I hope Mrs. Leslie will not suspect the part I played; but even if she does, she knows her interest too well to give voice to her thoughts. Yes, I will remain here; and, at the worst, I can account for my absence, by saying I went for a physician, and could not find one. If any testimony in the case should be needed to clear me of suspicion, I can bring forward Dr. Gregory, who himself in-

formed me, not long since, that it was not improbable the invalid might die suddenly from strangulation, caused by the rupture of an artery. Yes, this is my plan, for the world! and now I will take a walk. How cursed warm it is!"

Leaving Leon Dupree—a true son of his father—to pursue his walk and his vile meditations, let us return to the chamber of the dying brother.

When Mrs. Morley, the poor woman whom Leon sent up to his victim, entered the apartment of Lionel Linden, she found him literally weltering in his own blood, and already in the agony of strangulation. The horrible sight so shocked and terrified her, that she lost all control of her nerves, which refused her support, and she sunk down upon a seat, sick, faint and stupefied, and fixed her eyes upon the poor sufferer with a kind of morbid fascination. These moments were precious—for Lionel, for want of assistance, was even then choking and strangling to death—and his poor, weak, wasted frame was convulsed with suffocation. In his first convulsive agony, he had turned upon his face, and his hands had clinched in the bed, and he was now too weak to regain the position necessary for air, even had he not been too far gone to be conscious of what was required to prolong his earthly existence. His spirit was struggling to quit its frail tenement, and nature was struggling with death, and his gurgling groans and convulsions were awfully heart-sickening to hear and behold.

And yet Mrs. Morley sat, and heard, and saw, but offered no assistance. Poor woman! she was not to blame—for she was chained to her seat by a power beyond her control—and she suffered agonies almost

equal to those of him she gazed upon. She had never witnessed a scene like this before ; the sight of blood made her faint ; she was terrified almost out of her wits ; and she knew not what to do, even had she possessed the power to move and act. Her voice, too, that might have summoned assistance from her neighbours, or the street, was not at her command ; and so she sat, paralyzed with horror, and gazed, with starting eyeballs, upon the awful sight, till the moment for mortal aid passed by, and the body of poor Lionel Linden began to grow still in death.

At last, too late, the power of voice and motion came to her ; and she started up, with a wild shriek, and rushed, half frantic, down the stairs to the door, and, clinging for support to the casement, called loudly for help.

Her neighbours in Churchyard Court heard her, and came running to her in alarm. Two gentlemen, strangers to each other, who chanced to be passing abreast on Fourth street, heard her, and flew to her side.

“Up there ! up there !” was all the poor woman could gasp, as she stood with one hand clinging to the casement of the door and the other pointing to the stairs.

And they rushed up the stairs, pell-mell—four women and three men—and entered, in breathless haste, the awful chamber of death. They comprehended all at a glance ; they flew in alarm to the poor sufferer, scarcely a sufferer now ; they turned him over ; they raised him up ; they gazed upon his ghastly face, by the waning light—that face almost black with strangulation and red with blood ; they beheld a quivering

spasm ; they heard a slight, gurgling gasp ; they saw a dark stream of blood slowly ooze from his mouth ; and they laid him back—dead—in breathless silence—and all stood around his bed, thrilled with the solemn awe which such a fearful scene of death could not fail to inspire.

Of those who rushed in from Churchyard Court, it is not our purpose to speak, for they belong not to our story ; but the two men who came from Fourth street, at the call of Mrs. Morley, and now stood by the death-bed of Lionel Linden, were Herbert Raymond, the young lawyer, and Julian St. Cloud, the young artist—yet to each other they were as yet strangers, and had met here by chance.

The artist, with his pale, classic features—his large, dreamy eyes—his slender, graceful form—with his glossy, raven locks floating down over his broad, white, Byronic collar—had a *distingué* air, which contrasted forcibly with the tall, muscular, ungainly figure, homely features, and sandy complexion of the lawyer who stood beside him ; but both were gazing upon the dead with only such feelings as spring from two noble hearts ; and in heart, if not in external appearance, the lawyer was as comely in the sight of heaven as the artist—for angels find beauty only in the heart.

“ This is a solemn sight ! ” said Herbert to Julian.

“ Death is always solemn,” answered Julian : “ but this comes in the most terrible aspect I ever beheld. Who was this young man ? had he no friends ? ”

“ Poor fellow ! I do not know ! ” answered Herbert ; “ but I think the woman we met at the door is a relative of the deceased.”

“ We cannot console her for his loss,” said Julian,

glancing about the apartment; "but perhaps we can aid her to sustain the struggle of life. I am not rich—but I am alone in the world—and I have some means, thank God! which I can spare."

"I cannot do much," responded Herbert; "but the little I can spare shall be freely given. I thank you for the suggestion!"

"Mrs. Morley, the poor woman you seed at the door, ain't no relation of the poor young man," said one of the females present, who overheard the remarks of our friends; "but he's got a beautiful sister, as I don't see here. Poor cretur! she'll take it hard when she comes in, (I 'spect she's gone out somewhere,) for she loved her brother 'most to distraction."

"Is she poor?" inquired Herbert, sympathetically.

"Rich people don't live in sich places as this here," answered the woman, a little tartly.

"True!" rejoined Herbert, somewhat abashed and confused at a reply which jarred upon his sensitive spirit. "Suppose we remain a few minutes, if you think we can be of any service to the sister!" he added, turning to Julian.

"Certainly—by all means!" replied the artist.

The two turned away to the window, and the eye of Julian fell upon the back of the painting which Leon had brought hither and had not yet taken away. It stood on the work-stand, leaning against the wall, and Julian carelessly took it up and turned it over. The moment he beheld the beautiful face, which he had himself painted some months before, and recently sold to Leon Dupree for the sum of two hundred dollars, he started, and involuntarily uttered an exclamation of surprise, which drew other eyes upon the picture.

"Ah! that's the poor, dear gal herself!" said the same woman who had before addressed the lawyer and the artist. "Ain't she beautiful? Poor child!"

"Who—who—is this?" gasped Julian, facing round to the speaker, and fairly trembling with strange emotions.

"Why, it's the sister I telled you about—the sister of him what lies dead there—poor cretur!"

"Great God! is it possible!" murmured Julian, handing the painting to the lawyer, and turning away to conceal the emotions he could not suppress.

"Can this be a likeness of the girl?" said Herbert in surprise.

"It cannot be!" answered Julian, mechanically, keeping his face toward the window.

"Then you know her?" said Herbert.

"Me? no! but—it may be—you heard what the woman said!" stammered Julian, in some confusion.

"Well," rejoined Raymond, "it is the most lovely face I ever beheld; and I think it most exquisitely executed, though I do not profess to be a connoisseur. I would I knew the artist!"

Julian made no reply—but seating himself on the lounge, looked out of the window. Strange and powerful emotions were busy in his breast; and he wanted to think, to fancy, to dream, to hope, but not to speak.

Meanwhile, some of the females present had been busy with the dead—getting water, washing off the blood, and removing the crimson-dyed sheets—that the spectacle, which must soon be presented to the fond sister, might be less horribly shocking than they themselves had witnessed. It was that true, delicate, unselfish kindness on their part, of which the human

heart, in every grade of life, is seldom found wanting under circumstances calculated to awaken its innate sympathies. Men may preach as they will of the natural depravity of the human heart—but their doctrine is false! and a libel on their fellows and their Creator! The human heart is not naturally depraved; it may become artificially so; but even in the worst, there are times when the God-given germ of “good will to man” bursts forth spontaneously, and spreads the holy light, which angels bask in, over the spirit long inured to vice and crime.

A physician now appeared upon the scene, conducted hither by the boy who had been sent to summon him by the dark author of the deed. There was no occasion for him now, and he made a brief stay. He walked up to the corpse, felt the wrist and heart—already cold—asked a few questions, and took his departure. The boy looked eagerly about the death-chamber—noted each object—scanned every face—but spoke not a word. When the physician retired, he quietly followed him down to the door; and stepping outside, he leaned against the old building, in an attitude of meditation.

The shadows of advancing night were fast gathering over the solemn scene, when Mrs. Morley, who had quietly entered the apartment, and was standing by one of the windows, exclaimed, with a sigh:

“Ah! here comes the poor sister, accompanied by a lady! God help her! She must be prepared for the blow, or the shock may kill her!”

As she spoke, Mrs. Morley hurried down the stairs; and all present crowded to the windows, and there stood looking out, and listening, and awaiting the result in breathless silence.

CHAPTER XVIII.

THE FIRST SHOCK AND THE VISION.

It will be remembered that Villeta Linden had a presentiment of coming evil even before she took a tender leave of her brother to accompany Mrs. Leslie to her home. This presentiment did not leave her while she was away, but continually pressed upon her spirits, making her sad and gloomy. She strove to cast it off as a mere fancy—and she kept up an animated conversation with Mrs. Leslie for this purpose—but all the time her heart felt heavy, and she longed to hasten back to him she loved.

While on the way to her residence, Mrs. Leslie interested Villeta by speaking of her mother and brother, and assuring the poor girl how happy she was in having found, even at that late period, the children of Ellen Courtney, and she hoped she could yet make some atonement for her seemingly cruel withdrawal from one who had been her friend when she was otherwise friendless.

“But I must charge you not to even hint to Mr. Warren that I knew your mother, or anything of her, or her family!” she said, somewhat parenthetically, in the course of her remarks. “This request may surprise you—but there are reasons for it, which I will explain at another time.”

“I will not speak of it,” replied Villeta, “and I

will caution Lionel also. By-the-way, did I not understand that you and Mr. Warren are related?"

"Yes, distantly."

"Then you know something of your family, notwithstanding you were a foundling?" rejoined Villeta.

"Oh, yes—that is—something—yes!" stammered Mrs. Leslie, with a confusion that would have attracted notice and excited suspicion in a suspicious breast, though it passed unremarked by Villeta. "Yes—I will explain," pursued Mrs. Leslie. "Ah! here we are—this is my residence—and now let me welcome the daughter of my early friend to a dwelling which I trust will soon be her home."

They entered the house, and Villeta was delighted with the taste, neatness and elegance everywhere displayed; and Mrs. Leslie would have her visit every apartment: then tea was announced, and she was obliged to remain or seem rude; but the moment she could politely get away, she did so, and hurried back to her brother, Mrs. Leslie accompanying her.

"Bless me! how fast you walk, Villeta—I shall soon be out of breath!" said Mrs. Leslie, playfully, as they hurried along the street.

"Pardon me!" replied Villeta, slackening her pace; "in my selfish haste to get home, I had overlooked the fact of putting my friend to inconvenience."

"But why are you in such haste, Villeta?"

"I hardly know," answered Villeta, excitedly: "I am troubled: I fear I shall not find dear Lionel as well as when I left him."

"Nonsense, my dear child! Why, it is scarcely more than an hour since he assured you he felt better than usual."

"I know it—perhaps I am foolish—but we cannot altogether govern our feelings. I think he acted strangely—it may be all my fancy—but God send I find him no worse!"

And excited by her fears, Villeta unconsciously quickened her pace, and pressed forward with eager steps and palpitating heart. The moment she got a sight of her humble abode, she looked anxiously up at the windows of her apartment, and exclaimed:

"Oh! something has happened! for there is Mrs. Morley at the window. And see!" she added, clutching convulsively the arm of Mrs. Leslie—"there are others—strangers—the room is full!—oh! great God! support me!"

The youth who stood leaning against the building, with his face turned from the entrance, heard the words of Villeta, and looked curiously around at the new-comers; but the moment he caught a view of the features of the speaker and her companion, he started suddenly, turned as pale as death, and trembled in every limb. Both, however, were too much occupied with more serious matters to notice him; and perceiving this, he quickly recovered himself, and leisurely crossing the narrow alley, took up his position against the church-yard wall, near the corner of Fourth street, where, somewhat in shadow himself, he could face the dwelling without attracting attention, and see and hear what was taking place nearly opposite.

Mrs. Morley, pale and trembling, met the pale and trembling Villeta at the steps of her dwelling.

"My brother?" almost shrieked Villeta.

"Pray, be calm, Miss Linden!" said the agitated Mrs. Morley, grasping the hands of the poor orphan.

"My brother? speak! my brother?" cried Villeta. "Oh, God! you do not answer!" she continued, raising her voice, and quivering in every nerve with her intense excitement. "He is worse! he is dying! he is dead! You dare not speak—he is dead!—he is dead!—oh, my God! oh, my God! he is dead!"

The last words were uttered in a piercing shriek of anguish, and Villeta sunk into the arms of Mrs. Leslie.

A lady, who was ambling by on a black palfrey, heard these piercing words of anguish, and saw Villeta fall swooning into the arms of her companion, who lifted and bore her into the house, while other persons from different quarters came hurrying upon the scene. She quickly turned her horse into a narrow alley, and perceiving the boy, said:

"Pray tell me what is the matter here?"

"Misery!" replied the youth, sententiously: "the world is full of it."

"I know that, my little philosopher, or cynic," rejoined Grace De Vere—for the lady was no other—"but of what does this particular misery consist?"

"Death, and grief, and poverty—perhaps treachery—a not unusual combination!" replied the youth, bitterly.

"Will you condescend to be more explicit?" returned Grace, a little tartly—"or shall I inquire of some one else?"

"I only know that a young man, up stairs yonder, ruptured a blood vessel, a short time since, and is now dead; and the lady you heard shriek, and saw faint, I conjecture from her words to be his sister!" answered the boy, sullenly. "If you want to know more, you

had better go inside and ask those who can tell you more."

"And so I will, my little crab-apple, if I can find any one to hold my palfrey," replied Grace; "for I have means, and perhaps I can do something to alleviate the distress of those who have the double weight of grief and poverty to crush them down."

"If your intentions are thus generous, I will be your groom," said the boy, stepping forward and putting his hand upon the rein; "for true generosity is a rare virtue, especially among the wealthy."

"You speak bitterly for a youth!" said Grace, as she dismounted.

"Age is in experience, not years," answered the other; "and truth in this world has a bitter twang to those not used to it."

"Come, I like you!" returned Grace, frankly; "and I must know more of you. By my faith, you are no common lad!"

"Better for me if I were, perhaps!" replied the boy.

"Well, hold my palfrey till I come out, and I will talk further with you," rejoined Grace. "You have had some bitter experience, or I know little of the human heart; and if I can assist you in any way, you shall not have cause to think that all who are rich are base."

"You will find us here," answered the boy; "one brute, and one who envies it."

"I will not be long," said Grace; and turning away as she spoke, she entered the house of death and woe.

Villeta had been borne into the apartment occupied

by Mrs. Morley, and laid upon a mattress on the floor, which had hurriedly been placed there to receive her senseless form; and Grace, on her entrance, found quite a number of persons crowded around the poor girl, only two of whom, the good lady of the house and Mrs. Leslie, were actively employed in chafing her limbs, bathing her temples, and sprinkling water in her face, with a view of restoring animation.

"Good people," spoke Grace, in a polite but positive tone, "will you be kind enough to stand back and give the poor girl air! for unintentionally you are doing her an injury by crowding so close about her."

Her voice at once attracted general attention to herself—her appearance was one to command respect—and all who had been merely gratifying a morbid curiosity, at once complied with her request, several leaving the room. Grace instantly caught up an old fan lying on the table, and, producing a bottle of *sal volatile* from the pocket of her riding dress, knelt down by the side of Villeta, to assist in her restoration.

"How beautiful!" murmured Grace, as she bent over her; "but, alas! beauty is no protection against the miseries of life. Pardon me, ladies, if, as a stranger, I seem intrusive! but I assure you my motive is a good one. I heard her shriek, and saw her faint, and thought it possible I might be of service to her. Will you be kind enough to tell me what has happened?"

In as few words as possible, Mrs. Morley gave the desired information.

"Ah! poor girl! poor girl! what a terrible blow!" rejoined Grace, in a tone of commiseration. "But she is not friendless, I perceive!" she added, glancing at Mrs. Leslie, who was shedding tears of distress.

"No," sobbed the latter, "and never shall be while I live! Ah! God forgive me, if I am to blame for this! Had she not gone out with me, at my urgent request, and against her own inclination, perhaps it had not happened! Did I not understand you to say," she continued, addressing Mrs. Morley, "that a gentleman was with Mr. Linden when he was first attacked with this hemorrhage of the lungs?"

"Yes, and it was he that gave me the information," replied Mrs. Morley.

"Was it Mr. Warren?"

"I don't know his name—but it was the same person I've seen call here several times of late."

"Is he here now?"

"I don't know—he hurried out for a physician, and I haven't seen him since. A doctor came a few minutes ago, and a boy came with him."

"Was it the boy I just now saw outside?" inquired Grace.

"I think it was."

"Who is he?"

"I don't know, ma'am—I never saw him before."

"Hush!" whispered Mrs. Leslie at this moment.

"See! the poor girl is coming to—we must be careful not to excite her!"

Villeta now indeed showed signs of returning consciousness; and in a short time she heaved a long deep sigh, and opened her eyes. The shades of night had been gathering fast within the last few minutes, and already the light in the room was quite dim, so that it was difficult for her, just arousing from her swoon, to distinguish the features of those bending over her. She looked curiously from one to the other;

and then fixing her soft, blue eyes upon Grace, she murmured :

“ Who are you ? ”

“ A friend,” answered Grace.

“ I do not know you,” said Villeta, quietly, but without removing her eyes, which had the peculiar, glassy gleam of one who sees without a clear comprehension of the object of vision.

“ But you know me, my dear child, do you not ? ” inquired Mrs. Leslie, in a low, gentle tone.

Villeta slowly turned her eyes from Grace to the speaker, looked at her steadily for a few moments, and answered, with a faint smile :

“ Yes, I think I know you—you were my mother’s friend.”

“ I was, dear angel ! ” replied Mrs. Leslie, in a choking voice, as she took the hand of Villeta in hers and pressed it gently. And she added, in a lower tone, turning aside her face to conceal her emotion : “ Thank God ! she still retains her reason.”

“ And you know Mrs. Morley ? ” inquired the poor woman, in a gentle, soothing tone.

“ Oh, yes—yes—I know you too ! ” answered Villeta, making an effort to rise. “ But what are you all doing here around me ? what has happened ? Ha ! ” she cried, before any one had time to reply, while a fearful change flashed over her lovely countenance—“ I remember something now ! or did I dream it ? My brother—Lionel—something has happened to him ! ”

“ Dear Villeta, be calm, sweet girl ! ” said Mrs. Leslie, anxiously.

“ Try to be resigned to the will of God ! ” said Mrs. Morley.

"Oh! my God! it is true then! he is dead!" almost shrieked the poor girl, covering her face with her hands, and trembling in every nerve. "You are silent!" she continued, somewhat wildly: "you do not answer me! Why do you not speak, and contradict me? Say he is worse—say he is very far gone—say he is dying—but not dead!—no, no—not dead!—oh! great God! no—not dead! Only tell me he lives—that he will speak once more to his poor sister—if only the parting word—and I will bless you!"

"Alas! poor child!" groaned Mrs. Leslie: "God help you to bear up under this terrible affliction!"

"Oh! God of mercy! he is dead then?" cried Vileta, wildly. "And I away from him in his last moments! Oh! my brain!" she pursued, pressing her hands upon her temples. "Oh! my poor brain!—it aches—it burns—it is on fire! I am losing my senses—it is growing dark—I cannot see! Where are you? Good-by! I am going—going—go—"

The last word died away upon her lips, and she fell back upon the bed, as one dead. But as those around her were about to apply restoratives, she gently raised her hands, and waved them back; and then stretching her hands upward, she exclaimed, almost joyfully:

"I see him! I see him! he is near me—he is not dead—God our Father be praised! And there—there comes my dear mother!—oh! how shiningly white and beautiful she looks! and how sweetly she smiles! And there, too, is my dear father, whom the world still slanders! He is no robber—he is an angel in glory! And there are many more behind—a great throng! Hark! they sing! and oh! such heavenly music! it thrills through every nerve, and vibrates on

the inner chords of my very soul ! Is this death ? If so, then 'to die is gain'—the gain of immortal life in glory. Farewell, beloved friends ! I have seen you—I know you live—that you are hovering about me—and henceforth my spirit shall be strong to bear the ills of its mortal race."

She ceased speaking, drew a long, deep sigh, and remained still.

"Oh, God !" groaned Mrs. Leslie—"she has lost her reason !"

"Poor girl !" sighed Grace.

At this moment Villeta suddenly started up, opened her eyes, looked quickly around, and burst into tears. They were the first that had come to her relief, and they gushed forth in torrents.

"Do you know me ?" inquired Mrs. Leslie, in a tremulous voice : "do you know me, dear Villeta ?"

"Yes," sobbed Villeta, "I know you. Do not be alarmed, Mrs. Leslie—these tears are relieving me—I am better now. I have just had, oh ! such a sweet, such a glorious vision of the other world ! I have seen all my friends—my dear brother included—and know they all live and are happy ; and, for the rest, I can bear my grief in hope !"

"Then you really did see them ?" said Mrs. Leslie, wonderingly.

"Oh, yes !" answered Villeta, almost rapturously—"I saw them all, in their shining robes, and heard their songs of happiness and glory ! Come, I am calmer now," she added, turning to Mrs. Morley, "and you must tell me all about my dear brother !"

"Can you bear it ?" asked Mrs. Morley.

"Try me, and you shall see."

Mrs. Morley told her in as few words as she could, avoiding detail, and scarcely touching upon the horrible scenes which she herself had witnessed. Villeta, in spite of herself, cried violently ; but when she had heard the other through, she hastily dried her eyes, and said :

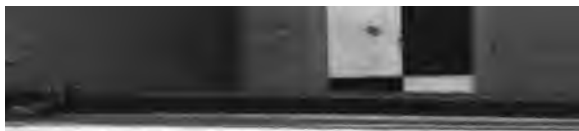
“ Now, my friends, conduct me to all that remains on earth of him I so loved ! ”

They tried to dissuade her from going at once—fearing the shock of beholding the corpse of her brother might prove more severe than she anticipated—but she insisted upon seeing it, declaring that she was equal to the sight ; and so, procuring a light, Mrs. Leslie and Grace, one on either side, supported her trembling frame up the stairs, and into the solemn chamber of death, where several persons, among them our friends, were silently waiting to witness the result of this terrible ordeal.

CHAPTER XIX.

IN THE CHAMBER OF DEATH.

SLOWLY, trembling in every nerve, Villeta approached the bed, where, but little more than an hour before, she had taken a tender leave of him who now lay still in death. She did not shriek, nor cry aloud, when her eyes first rested upon the mortal remains of that beloved brother ; but with slow, heavy steps, still supported by her companions, she drew up by his side, and for a few moments stood and gazed silently upon



that still, cold form ; and then quietly taking a hand, that could return her warm pressure no more forever, she sunk down upon her knees, and bedewed it with tears that welled up from her very heart. For the space of some five minutes she remained thus, weeping and sobbing, and uttering low, heavy moans of anguish, while all present gathered silently around her, and every eye shed tears of sympathy.

At length she looked up, glanced calmly over the weeping group, and in a deep, solemn, impressive tone, that rung out clear and distinct through that silent chamber, and thrilled all who heard it, she said :

“ He is not here, but is risen ! God’s will be done on earth, as it is done in Heaven ! ”

There came a low, solemn, responsive “ Amen ! ” and all started at the sound, but no one knew who spoke.

Villeta slowly rose, and bending quietly over the corpse, pressed the warm lips of life to the cold lips of death, and gently murmured :

“ Farewell, dear Lionel ! I resign thee to a happier world, till I can meet thee where there will be no more parting forever.”

As these words were spoken, each person present experienced a strange, unaccountable sensation, which seemed to thrill through every nerve and fibre of the body, down and into and through all the secret recesses of the spirit—a vibration, as it were, of music unheard—of music sweet, rapturous, glorious, holy—producing an impression that was never erased through all the changing circumstances of life.

As Villeta turned away from the bed, Grace De Vere took her by the hand, and in a sweet, earnest, sympathetic tone, said :

"Miss Linden, I am a stranger to you, but I hope you will let me be your friend! I have heard enough of your history, to learn that you, like myself, are an orphan—and this I need not assure you is a hard world for the lonely and friendless. I am rich—though I do not speak it boastingly—and I want you to come and be my companion—my sister!"

"Oh! kind lady, I thank you, from my soul!" answered Villeta, with a gush of tears; "but I am so oppressed and bewildered now, that I know not how to reply."

"Nay, you must not take her away from me!" interposed Mrs. Leslie. "Her mother was my earliest and truest friend, and I have a debt of gratitude to pay the daughter."

"Then your claim upon her, my dear madam, is sacred," answered Grace; "but you must permit me to call upon her, and share with you her friendship—I trust her love. But," she added, hastily producing and opening a card-case that glittered with diamonds, "let me not overlook the fact that I am still a stranger to you both—and, for lack of a mutual friend, let me thus informally introduce myself!" and she handed a card to each.

"I thank you, and beg you will accept mine in return!" said Mrs. Leslie, turning away to the light.

"I have none to offer you, dear lady!" said Villeta, with some slight embarrassment—for even in that moment of crushing grief, she could not forget her poverty, and the remembrance was humiliating to one, proud and sensitive, who had been born, and for many years reared, in affluence.

"Oh, I want none from you, dear sister—for I will call you sister, and love you too!" cried Grace, impulsively, throwing an arm around Villeta, and imprinting an affectionate kiss upon her lips. "Your name, dear Villeta, is written where it can never be erased—upon my heart. Ah!" she added, apologetically—"you think me a strange, wild being, to introduce and make myself so familiar at such a time—but I am impulsive, seldom govern my feelings, and no one could help loving you."

"Dear lady——"

"Grace! Grace!" interrupted the other. "Lady no more—nor madam—nor miss—nor any other formal title! I called you Villeta, and you must use no colder term."

"Dear sister, then," cried Villeta, with a warm gush of feeling and a flood of tears, as she threw herself upon the bosom of her new friend, "I think not that you are wild, or strange, as you say—but that you are an angel, whom Heaven has sent to comfort me in my hour of heaviest grief and desolation!"

Had they known all, they might indeed have thought that the hand of Heaven had brought them together. For was it not strange that, through the wisdom of an over-ruling Providence, they should owe this meeting, and it might be their future happiness, to the workings of the evil genius of Leon Dupree? Had he not encountered Grace that morning, and she fled to get rid of him—and, through the consequences of his subsequent damnable deed, been checked on her return—it is possible, nay probable, that she and Villeta had never met—to say nothing of the drawing

together, upon the same scene, some other important actors in their drama of life, whose destinies, by this occurrence, might become mingled with their own. God, in his infinite wisdom, can bring great good from what, to our short-sighted, imperfect vision, seems great evil; and could we poor earth-travelers stand upon that height of knowledge from whence we could overlook the great future, as one upon a mountain's brow surveys the scene below, we should perceive many a rugged and dangerous path leading to a quiet and beautiful place of rest and happiness.

"Is your name Grace De Vere?" inquired Mrs. Leslie, in a tone of some surprise, as she handed the heiress her card, on the withdrawal of the latter from the warm, affectionate, and tearful embrace of Villeta.

"It is—have you heard it before?" said Grace.

"Often," replied Mrs. Leslie, "have I heard Mr. Du—a—that is—I should say—Mr. Warren—speak of you in high terms."

In getting her own card, Mrs. Leslie had glanced at the one given her by Grace; and the name, which she had more than once heard Leon mention, coupled with his own ambitious designs, had quite startled her.

"Mr. Warren!" mused Grace—"I have not the pleasure of knowing him; and I fancy," she added, with a touch of her wonted pleasantry, "he knows very little of me, since you say he speaks of me in terms of commendation."

"Oh, I know him!" said Villeta; "he has been very kind to us; and—and—and—my poor brother thought him a true friend."

"Oh, then it is the gentleman who——"

Grace was about to add, "who was with Mr. Linden



before he died," when, glancing around her for the first time, (for hitherto she had been solely occupied with Villeta, and had taken no notice of the other parties present,) she suddenly encountered the eyes of Herbert Raymond fixed steadily upon her; and with a start of surprise she checked her speech, blushed to the temples and grew pale the same moment, and then stammered, in confusion:

"Herbert—Mr. Raymond, I should say—you—is it possible you are here?"

Herbert had been for some time standing within a few feet of Grace, and had overheard her conversation with Villeta; but the most powerful emotions had been agitating his noble breast ever since the moment when he had been almost startled and quite amazed at seeing her enter the room with the lovely mourner.

"I have been some time here, Miss De Vere," he said, in reply to Grace, as he stepped forward and took her hand, with just sufficient embarrassment to indicate great depth of feeling and profound respect; "and I have, unintentionally on my part, been a witness of what has passed between you and this poor afflicted young lady; and, Grace—Miss Grace—Miss De Vere—(with great emotion) I want to say, God bless you! and God preserve you! for you have a kind, a noble, a generous heart—and—yes—God bless you, Grace!—pardon me! Miss De Vere!—I—I have done you wrong—great wrong—in my heart I mean—and I want to ask your forgiveness!"

"Oh! sir—Herbert—Mr. Raymond—I—I—it is very warm here—I feel faint!" almost gasped Grace, as she staggered forward to the window and sunk down on the lounge, completely overpowered by the

feelings which the strong, earnest, passionate language of the other called into action.

Herbert, by this unlooked-for emotion on the part of Grace, became much excited, and even alarmed. What was he to do? She was warm; she was faint; she wanted air; she had lost her speech; she had sunk down on the lounge: perhaps she was going to swoon—perhaps die! What was to be done? what could he do? He stood and looked at her a moment; he fidgeted the next; he ran his fingers through his hair; he scratched his head; he twirled his thumbs; he became immensely heated in his uncertainty; but, at last—happy thought—he darted upon his hat on the table, caught it up nervously, and commenced fanning her violently. It was not a scene for levity, that chamber of death—nor was Grace in a mood for merriment—otherwise it is more than probable that one of her gay, ringing laughs would have startled and shocked the sensitive Herbert, and buried the preceding sentiment under ridicule. Even as it was, she could not fail to perceive the ridiculous in his attitude, manner, and earnestness; and, with a gentle smile, she said:

“Thank you! that will do: I feel better: pray be seated!”

And Herbert put down his hat, and sat down beside her, and they opened a low conversation, exchanging explanations as to how it had chanced that both were present upon a scene where both were strangers.

Meantime, we must not overlook Julian St. Cloud. From the moment when he discovered the painting, and heard it pronounced the likeness of the sister of

the dead, up to the moment which brings us back to him, his brain had been excited by many a strange, wild thought, and his heart had been the theatre of many a strange, wild sensation. Modest, retiring, and unassuming—his mind, during several of his later years, burdened with grief, care, trouble, and study—a poetical dreamer by nature—he had mingled little in the natural world, but had lived mostly in the world of his own creation. The warm ties of consanguinity severed by death—without friends in the true sense of the term—without congenial companions—a sad and lonely pilgrim on the highway of life—there had been a deep and aching void in his heart—a yearning of the soul for a something which seemed unattainable; and in this state of mind—in one of his saddest and most dejected moods—he had for the first time looked upon one sweet, angelic face, and felt he beheld the embodied beauty of his brightest dreams. As the rays of light pass into the camera-obscura, and impress upon the sensitive plate the image of the object before the lens, so had an invisible power conveyed to his soul, and imprinted there, the image of the lovely face before his eye. A moment had sufficed for an impression which neither time nor eternity might efface; and memory, in his happiest moments, had ever since rolled up the lovely image among forms ideal; and in his waking moments, and in his dreams, it had been present to the vision of the mind; and he had loved and adored it, as the true and beautiful, which in spirit, if not in substance, was his. The image of that face, by his art, had been produced upon canvas, and then sold, under the stern law of necessity. He had parted, with many a sigh of regret, with the tan-

gible representation of what he had loved ; but he had consoled himself with the reflection that no power could take the bright image from his heart, and in moments of leisure he could reproduce it. Nor did he believe that he who purchased the picture knew aught of the original—but that he merely fancied a resemblance between it and another—else would he have been eager to learn something of a being who had already begun to mingle in his destiny. Nor when so unexpectedly he found the painting in the house of death, and heard it pronounced the likeness of the fair mourner of him who had just breathed his last, could he believe it was aught more than fancy,—for his mind had long since sublimed the bright original into something above and beyond mere earthly form ; and when he had invoked it to be his hope, his guiding star, his thoughts had ever sought it in the invisible world.

Such being the circumstances under which Julian St. Cloud anxiously awaited the appearance of Villeta Linden, we must leave the reader to imagine his emotions, when, on beholding her pale, lovely face, as she approached the corpse of her brother, he saw in truth that she was the original of the painting—that she was the being whose bright image had so long been irradiating his soul as the light from an angel-watcher—inciting his ambition to grasp at only the great, the noble, the beautiful, the true, the holy.

With his large dreamy eyes riveted upon her, he stood silent, almost breathless, wondering if she were real, or himself the sport of a dream—so fearful was he that his present hope might vanish and leave him a prey to gloom—when suddenly, as if an evil demon

had breathed upon his spirit, he felt a strange, cold, withering, blasting, enervating suspicion creep over him—a suspicion that brought more chilling horror to his soul than would the sight of a thousand scenes of death! Why had the painting been purchased from him at such a price, and presented to her? for he knew not but that she was now the owner. Had another won her heart, and, through her love, robbed her of her purity—changing a holy temple, wherein an angel might worship, into a sepulchre of evil, where Heavenward aspirations lay buried? Could this be! The thought was maddening. He glanced around, over the scantily furnished apartment, with a throbbing brain. This seemed not the proper resort of one who had boasted of his wealth—who had boasted of moving in the aristocratic circles of fashion and folly. If he had ever entered here with a noble motive—if he had ever entered here with a pure and holy love for this poor child of misfortune—why had she been left to struggle with her poverty? The daily record of the bad deeds of the world showed wealth often striving to crush poverty—showed men of wealth and leisure continually throwing temptations in the paths of indigent virtue, when beauty presided over the frail form of the toiling pilgrims—showed men of means, without principle, ever seeking to gratify their base passions at a small cost to themselves, but at the awful expense of eternal happiness to their poor, deluded victims! And had one of these human demons been here? and was the lovely being before him—the idol of his very soul—a fallen angel?

It was at this moment the voice of Villeta spoke those solemn words, while kneeling by her brother,

which drew out that strange, responsive amen; and the heart of Julian said, with a prayer of gratitude :

"No, no—I wrong her—she is pure—she is pure!—that voice comes from a temple in which the spirit of God dwelleth!"

From that moment he watched-eagerly for an opportunity to address her; and as Grace De Vere—whom he had recognised, but was much surprised to see here—withdrew from Villeta, to confer with Herbert Raymond, he approached the object of his solicitude, with no little trepidation, and, in a somewhat hurried, tremulous voice, said :

"Miss Linden—for so I hear you addressed—pardon me, a stranger, for intruding myself upon your notice at such a time—though I must plead the occasion as my excuse for being here—for I was attracted hither by a cry——Good heavens! you are ill!"

The exclamation was drawn from him by a sudden change in the appearance of Villeta. When he first began to address her, she looked up with a start of surprise; then the blood rushed upward, deeply suffusing neck, face, and temples; the next moment the crimson tide retreated, leaving her sweet features as pale as marble, and seemingly as cold; and then, with drooping lids, she reeled, half fainting, and was caught and supported by Mrs. Leslie, who gently seated her upon the lounge.

"It is too close here, my dear child!" said Mrs. Leslie, tenderly: "you have gone through with more than nature can sustain; let me take you home with me!"

"No! no!" murmured Villeta—"it is not what you suppose—it is—I—I—shall be better soon."

"Pardon me, ladies, if I have done wrong—if I seem intrusive!" said Julian, trembling with excitement. "I surely meant all for the best. I was about to offer my services to remain through the night with the deceased. If you have other friends to watch with the corpse, I will not press myself upon you—but, I can assure you, if I can be of any service, it will afford me much gratification to make myself useful to you, who are crushed down with this heavy blow of Providence. My name is Julian St. Cloud—at present a resident of this city—and, by profession, an artist. I chanced to be passing along the street, when I heard a lady call for help—to which I responded by hastening hither—and this explanation I pray you to accept as my apology for being here at such a time."

"You are very kind, sir!" replied Mrs. Leslie; "and permit me to sincerely thank you for myself, and in behalf of Miss Linden. We do need watchers: and, I regret to say, our friends are few; and as you so generously propose—"

"Oh, madam, say no more!" interrupted Julian; "I will remain, for I have nothing to call me away; and, while I deeply regret the occasion which requires such poor aid as I can render, I am rejoiced to know it is in my power to serve you! I think," he added, with tender feeling, "it would be better for Miss Linden to retire from this sad scene, and endeavor to compose her mind, and be resigned to the will of God! and she may do so, with the solemn assurance that whatever is needful to be done I will do!"

"Oh, sir," returned Villeta, in a choked and tremulous voice, "how shall I ever thank you? how repay you?"

"The reflection of having done my duty, and served one in distress, will more than repay me!" responded Julian, deeply agitated by various emotions. "I have known what it is to lose friends by death, and feel the want of human sympathy in my loneliness and sorrow," he continued, in a voice scarcely articulate; "but if, through my own trials, my heart has been made more responsive to the woes of others, perhaps in the end I shall clearly see, as already I fain would believe, that all has been ordered for my gain."

"Dear Villeta," said Mrs. Leslie, "I think you had better take Mr. St. Cloud's advice, and leave this sad scene for the present! You cannot serve the dear departed by remaining here now, but will only suffer yourself by being a witness of what must necessarily take place, when he arrives whose business it is to prepare the remains of your brother for the last solemn rite which the living can pay to the dead."

Villeta covered her face, and sobbed.

"And as your dear brother died somewhat suddenly," added Julian, "it is thought by some that the summoning of the Coroner will be the first proper proceeding."

"Ah!" said Mrs. Leslie, with a slight start of surprise—"is such proceeding then necessary?"

"A mere form, madam, which, under the circumstances, it may be best to comply with. Do not be troubled, Miss Linden! I will remain, and report to you everything which may take place in your absence."

"We shall not be far from here," rejoined Mrs. Leslie. And she gave Julian the name of the street in which she lived, and the number of her residence, adding to Villeta: "Come, my dear child, come home



with me ! come home with your mother's friend ! and leave all to this good gentleman, whom may Heaven reward for his disinterested kindness !"

" Oh, sir," exclaimed Villeta, with a warm burst of emotion, addressing Julian, " I will take your advice, and retire, trusting you with all that remains on earth which is dear to my heart !"

" And God judge me with new woes, if I keep not the trust sacred !" replied Julian, in a low, tremulous voice, and with tearful eyes.

Others now began to crowd around—some to offer advice, and some to condole with the afflicted mourner ; but though all was kindly meant, Mrs. Leslie perceived that the coarse words of rougher natures jarred discordantly upon the delicately sensitive spirit of the afflicted girl ; and, thanking them in her behalf, she made another effort to withdraw her from the scene. As she was about to leave the apartment, Grace came hastily forward, took her hand, and apologised for quitting her so abruptly—giving, as a reason, that she had suddenly encountered a very dear friend, and had acted on the impulse of surprise. Then she hurriedly explained how it had chanced that he was here, and added :

" Though not an appropriate time for an introduction, still I must beg, dear sister, that you will know one who is anxious to serve you—Mr. Herbert Raymond."

At the mention of his name, Herbert stepped forward, and, bowing, said, with some slight embarrassment :

" Miss Linden, excuse me the question I am about to ask ! and which I venture to ask now, because of its

importance. Was Eldridge Linden, Cashier of ——— Bank, your father?"

"He was," answered Villeta, changing color, and becoming much agitated; while the different parties standing around, with the exception of Grace, looked from one to the other in surprise.

"Then permit me to add," rejoined the young lawyer, "even though my remarks may appear ill-timed, that, from intelligence received by the last mail packet from Europe, you are supposed to be one of the heirs of a wealthy but distant relative, lately deceased."

"Is this indeed true, sir?" inquired Mrs. Leslie, excitedly.

"To the best of my belief, madam," replied Herbert.

"Thank Heaven! then she will no longer be cursed with poverty, let what will happen to me!" rejoined Mrs. Leslie, earnestly.

"It matters little what my fortune may be now," sighed Villeta, "since all are gone who shared with me the bitter cup. Oh!" she cried, springing forward and seizing a hand of the dead—"had this come when thou wast in health, noble brother, perhaps thou hadst been living now, and smiling happily on thy now lonely sister!" and, completely overcome with her emotions, she sunk down on the bed of death, in a state of mind bordering on total apathy.

"We must remove her," said Mrs. Leslie, anxiously, to Grace De Vere. "Too much has been crowded upon her mind at once; and if she remain longer in this stifling air, I fear the consequences will be serious."

The speaker, Grace, and one of the women present, now hastened to take up the poor mourner, and bear

her down the stairs to the apartment of Mrs. Morley, where they once more laid her upon the mattress, and commenced fanning her and applying restoratives.

"If I only had her at my house," pursued Mrs. Leslie, "with none but myself near, I think I might succeed in soothing and bringing her back to a rational state."

"I will send for a carriage," replied Grace, "and leave her in your care—it should have been done sooner."

She then requested the room to be cleared of all except Mrs. Leslie and Mrs. Morley; and going out herself, she employed a man, who was standing idly by the door, to hasten for a carriage.

"Is Miss Linden ill? very ill? dangerously ill?" inquired a low, tremulous voice, just behind Grace, as she stood in the door, looking out into the night, for it was now quite dark.

"She is ill, but I trust not dangerously ill," answered Grace; and as she replied, she turned, and encountered Julian St. Cloud, his fine, noble features as pale as death. "I think we have met before," added Grace, bowing a recognition.

"You did me the honor to call at my studio this morning," returned Julian.

"That was a mistake," said Grace; "but I will do myself the honor to call again soon, intentionally."

"I thank you," rejoined Julian, bowing. "You are sure Miss Linden is not dangerously ill?"

"God knows I hope not, sir—poor, sweet angel!" replied Grace, with feeling. "You are a friend of hers? perhaps a relative?"

"A friend," answered Julian, "as who could see her and not be! I would serve her with my life."

"God bless you for those words!" said Grace, impulsively.

They stood conversing till the expected carriage made its appearance, when Grace again entered Mrs. Morley's room, and found Villeta sitting up, and conscious of what was taking place, though much exhausted, physically and mentally. Grace kissed her fondly, said a few kind words, and then, with Mrs. Leslie, supported her to the vehicle, which soon bore her away from the scene of her greatest misery. As Grace turned to mount her palfrey, Herbert Raymond accosted her.

"Are you about to leave, Miss De Vere?" he inquired.

"Ah! is it you, friend Raymond?" she replied, with a touch of that gayety which she could not long repress: "Upon my soul, I had quite forgotten you in the excitement!"

"I do not expect to live in your remembrance any longer than I chance to be before your eyes," he rejoined, somewhat coldly.

"Ah! indeed!" said Grace. "Are you about to leave also?"

"No! I shall remain here through the night, with the gentleman with whom you were speaking."

"Mr. St. Cloud—a noble young man, and a warm friend of Miss Linden," replied Grace.

"I do not know his name," said Herbert; "but he seems a high minded gentleman, and all such are the friends of the unfortunate."

"In which category let Herbert Raymond place

himself," said Grace, "since the unfortunate receive his sympathies also. Is she not lovely?"

"Who?"

"Miss Linden."

"Very, if I am a judge."

"And she is now an heiress," pursued Grace.

"Which will make her still lovelier in the eyes of those who see beauty only in wealth," rejoined Herbert.

"Why could not this wealth have come sooner and made her happy?" pursued Grace, in a musing tone.

"Poor, sweet, lovely orphan! how my heart yearns toward her! If I were a man, like you, Mr. Raymond, I should fall in love with her."

"If altogether like me, perhaps you would not," replied Herbert.

"Is your heart then impervious to the tender passion?"

"One may love, Miss De Vere, and not love even the most lovely."

"Faith, that is true!" replied Grace, looking up into the homely face of her companion with a meaning smile, which he saw, by the gleam of a neighboring lamp, but did not know how to interpret. "Yes, that is truth from a lawyer—which is equivalent to fire from ice. Ah! I crave your pardon! I remember now—you are a *truthful* lawyer—a *rara avis* indeed! I am glad you are going to remain here to-night—it does credit to your heart: and—yes—you have a heart, I am sure. Well, (holding out her hand,) good-by! You know where I live, and my doors are always open to my friends. I have not been home since I saw you in the morning, and I fear I shall find aunt in mourning weeds. Poor Villeta!

God be with her ! I will not pity the brother, for he is out of the misery of this world, and the other world is a better one. There, good night ! And now I wish to speak a word with this youth, who has so patiently held my bonny black Bess."

"Good night, Miss De Vere !" said Herbert, as he shook the hand of Grace and turned back to the house of death.

And as he went, he muttered :

"The strangest creature I ever saw ! I do not know what to think of her—how to take her—what to say to her—how to treat her ! I only know I love her—wildly, madly—would to Heaven it were otherwise !"

CHAPTER XX.

THE PLOT THICKENS.

SLOWLY the guilty villain, Leon Dupree, returned to look upon his evil work. It had grown dark during his absence, and lights were gleaming from the different windows of the old building when he again beheld it, and many persons could be seen moving about within, and now and then came to his ear a low murmur of many voices. On the opposite side of Fourth street he took up his position, and for some time stood undecided whether to draw nearer to the house of death or retire ; but curiosity at length got the better of fear, and he crossed over to Churchyard-Court, determined to enter boldly, and if the brother were already dead, for this he did not yet know, to condole with the living sister.

But on reaching Churchyard Court, the first object which arrested his attention was the little black palfrey of Grace De Vere. Could it indeed be hers—or only one resembling it? He drew nearer, and knew by the side-saddle it had been ridden hither by a lady. Surely it could not be black Bess—for what could Grace be doing here! A boy was holding the animal by the bit; and by the light of the street-lamp, at the corner of the alley, Leon could see it was the youth he had sent for a physician. Would the boy recognise him, should he approach as a stranger, keep himself in shadow, and disguise his voice? He would make the trial. With all necessary precautions, therefore, he drew near the youth, and inquired:

“What has happened here, my lad?”

“You should know best,” was the sententious reply, spoken in a tone of quiet indifference.

“Why should I know best, young sir?” asked Leon, not certain, even by the answer of the other, that he was recognised.

“Because you were the first witness of the terrible scene in yonder dwelling,” replied the boy.

“Ha! you are the youth I sent for a physician!” rejoined Leon, now determined to put a bold face on the matter.

“And you are the man who went at the same time for another,” said the boy.

“Unfortunately I could not find one at home,” returned Leon.

“I did, and brought one, and so earned my reward,” said the youth.

“Yes, I remember what I promised,” rejoined Leon, “in the event of your getting a physician here before my return. Here is a sovereign for you!”

"Thank you!" said the boy, as he quietly took it and dropped it into his pocket.

"Now tell me—is the young man better?"

"Yes, much better."

"Ha! there are hopes of his recovery?"

"His friends mourn."

"How mourn? what do you mean?"

"I mean they grieve, because he is better."

"You talk strangely—I do not understand you."

"Go within, and look upon him, and then you will understand me."

"Who are those I see at the windows?"

"You know as well as I."

"You are impudent, boy!"

"Then do not question me!"

"But I will question you! and I will have civil answers, too!" rejoined Leon, in a quick, angry tone.

"My tongue is my own, and you are not my master!" retorted the boy, sharply.

"But your tongue will get you into trouble, if you do not bridle it!"

"Perhaps it has done so already—but I will use it as I please—and if you lay hand on me, you do it at your peril!" rejoined the other, somewhat fiercely.

Leon paused, bit his lip, clinched his hand, and seemed half resolved to strike the audacious youth to his feet; but a single moment's reflection convinced him of the folly and imprudence of giving way to his passion at such a time and place; and so he resumed, in a conciliating tone:

"Come, lad, I like your spirit! I did not really intend to threaten, but only to try your mettle! Now tell me—for I am much distressed—is the poor young man really better?"

"I said so just now," was the sullen reply.

"Ah! Heaven be praised! then he will recover?"

"Not his body."

"How? what do you mean?"

"His body is dead."

"Dead! and you said he was better?"

"So he is."

"Why, is death better than life?"

"For him—yes!"

"Ah! I see your drift now! he is better, because he has ceased to suffer, poor fellow! Did you know him?"

"No."

"He was a noble young man," said Leon.

"And leaves a beautiful sister," said the boy.

"Ha! do you know her?"

"I saw her return."

"Poor young lady! did she take his death hard?"

"Why do you not go in and see?"

"Because I cannot bear to look upon the dead, and witness the grief of the living. Ah me! and he is really dead? Poor fellow! poor fellow! And did his sister return in time to see him die?"

"The news of death met her at the threshold."

"Ah! poor girl! poor girl! my soul pities her! but I cannot bear to look upon her in her grief!" said Leon, feigning emotions he did not feel. "Did she return alone?"

"There was a lady with her," answered the boy.

"Yes," pursued Leon, by way of explanation, "I dropped in to cheer up the spirits of the poor invalid, as has for a long time been my almost daily custom, and we were conversing about his sister, who

had just gone out with a lady friend, when, alas! he was suddenly seized with one of his fits of coughing, during which exertion he ruptured an artery—and now you tell me he is dead! Ah! truly is it said, that life and death go hand in hand.”

“And misery dances in their footsteps,” added the youth.

“True! very true!” mused Leon. “By-the-by, whose horse is this?”

“A lady’s.”

“So I had conjectured, for gentlemen do not ride on side-saddles. Do you know her name?”

“I may have heard it.”

“Did you ever see her before?”

“Yes—once.”

“Is it Miss De——” Leon checked himself suddenly, and added, with some confusion: “Will you not tell me her name?”

“I do not think I will.”

“Why?”

“I do not choose to give any reason why.”

“You are an impudent varlet!” said Leon, out of all patience—“and I will not waste my breath talking with you.”

He turned on his heel, and disappeared around the corner of Fourth street; and the boy, without deigning a reply, looked after him, with a smile of scorn.

But though it was apparently the design of Leon to quit the vicinity of his evil work, it was not so in reality; for no sooner had he got out of sight of the youth, than he stopped; and drawing himself close up against the wall which ran along Fourth street, he moved back to a point from which he could get a view

of the house of death; and here he remained till the arrival of the carriage which was to take away Villeta; when, fearing discovery, he crossed the street, but returned the moment the vehicle drove away, and just in time to overhear the conversation between Grace De Vere and Herbert Raymond.

This conversation put him in possession of some curious and puzzling, if not startling facts: viz: that Grace was present—that Raymond was present—that St. Cloud was present—that Villeta was supposed to be an heiress—that the different parties were all friends of the lovely orphan—and so forth and so on.

“What the deuce does it all mean?” wondered Leon: “how came all these to be her friends? and by what magic have they all been brought together here at such a time? Is it possible they have all been in my secret? that they have suspected my design, and are now all leagued to play against me? By heavens! I am confounded—I do not understand it!—for even the boy, now I think of it, acted his part as if he had rehearsed it. Ha! Mrs. Leslie—can it be she has betrayed me? But then how could she betray what she did not know? and no one could have known my design against the brother, for not to a living soul did I reveal it. I may have been suspected by Mrs. Leslie—but I do not see how, even through suspicion, she could have brought these different parties together here at such a time. If I believed in witchcraft, I should suspect some one of having had dealings with the very devil himself. Well, well, I must look into this matter, cautiously and prudently; and if I find they have attempted to outwit me, I will show them that one little brain can outscheme them all,

and triumph over their defeat. And Grace tells that gawky lawyer she has not been home since she saw him in the morning—since, in fact, she ran away from me. Where has she spent the day? and how, in the name of all the saints, does it chance that she is here now, unless by some previous design? Ha! stop! methinks I have it! Mrs. Leslie has betrayed me, and during my absence! Yes, she has seen Vileta, and told her all, and they have plotted together, and taken Grace and the others into their secret; and since I saw Mrs. Leslie, they have devised the plan of meeting here, in order to expose and ridicule me on my return with Miss Linden as I had proposed. But they made a slight mistake, and only got in at the death. Yes, this must be the real truth—though, even with this explanation, there are some things which I cannot understand. Would Mrs. Leslie indeed betray me? what interest could she have in doing so? she who has always served me faithfully. I do not know what to think of it. If it be not as I suspect, then I must believe that all h—l has conspired against me. Well, well, we shall see. If they have plotted together against me, they certainly do not know that I suspect their design; and if I cannot counter-plot, out-general, and defeat them, I deserve to be choked for a fool. But let me hear what Grace says to that chit of a boy."

The foregoing thoughts flashed from the brain of the scheming villain in a tithe of the time it has taken the reader to gather them from our pen; and as the young lawyer turned back to the house after his brief interview with Grace, Leon became all attention to gather whatever might pass between her and the boy, hoping

thereby to get some clue to what, in spite of his imaginary elucidation, he still regarded as a vexatious mystery.

"Well, my lad," said Grace to the youth, "I find you have been faithful to your trust."

"A rare virtue, when temptations combat it," was the ready but quiet reply.

"Not so rare, perhaps, as you think, my little cynic! But come! I feel quite interested in you; and you must tell me who you are, and how I can serve you, and what has happened to one of your years to cause you to speak so bitterly!"

"Suppose I inquire first who it is that questions me?" said the boy.

"Well, I am Grace De Vere, a resident of Philadelphia, and a friend to all who suffer."

"A friend to all mankind then," returned the other.

"My name is Paul."

"But you have another name?"

"Yes—Mortvie—Paul Mortvie."

"Well, Paul, where do you live?"

"Anywhere—everywhere—nowhere!"

"Like your namesake of old," laughed Grace. "But surely you have some place you call your home?"

"Not in this world."

"You certainly sleep somewhere on our planet, Paul?"

"When I sleep—yes."

"Well, where do you sleep?"

"Wherever I chance to be when my physical nature overpowers my mental."

"But have you no home?"

"No."

"No parents?"

"No."

"An orphan?"

"Yes."

"Ah! poor lad!" sighed Grace. "But you have friends?"

"None."

"An orphan—without home—without friends?"

"Yes."

"Poor lad! you are to be pitied."

"I want no pity."

"But you surely will not refuse kindness?"

"If offered in the way of charity—yes!"

"What do you do for a living?"

"Feed on my heart—on my passions!"

"You answer strangely, Paul!"

"I answer promptly, Miss De Vere."

"What can I do to serve you?"

"What do you wish to do?"

"Make you happy, Paul."

"You cannot—it is not in your power."

"Come, confide in me—tell me your history—and I will try."

"You are a stranger to me."

"But I will be a friend, Paul, if you will let me."

"I will not refuse your friendship."

"And will you come and see me?"

"If you wish it."

"I do; and if, as you say, you have no home and no friends—which I can hardly believe, even though you assert it, for you are well clothed, and speak like a youth of education—if you have no home and friends, I say, I will provide for you, on condition that you

first give me your entire confidence, and tell me your whole history."

"I do not think I shall accept any favors from you on such conditions," answered Paul, coldly.

"Very well, sir—if you are resolved to be obstinate, have your pleasure!" replied Grace, somewhat haughtily. "In kindness I have made my offer, and it rests with you to accept or reject it."

"If your offer be made in kindness, it is not generously made!" said Paul.

"In what respect?"

"You require of me what is of more value to me than your favor—my secret. True generosity flows outward as free as air, and he who receives it is required to make no sacrifice."

"But generosity may produce evil instead of good, by flowing outward to an unworthy object," said Grace.

"In which case the sin rests with the receiver, not the giver," replied the youth.

"But the power of evil is thus created, to the injury of one party, if not both; and whoever gives blindly may not give wisely, my little philosopher!" rejoined Grace, who began to be struck with, and secretly admire, the seemingly precocious abilities of Paul. "Far be it from me, however," she continued, "to require any confidence from you which it is not proper for you to bestow; I only ask assurance that, in whatever I may do for you, I may not be doing injustice to yourself and others."

"What others?" inquired Paul. "I have already told you that I stand alone in the world—without parents—without home—without friends."

"Only prove this to me," returned Grace, "and that

you are honest and truthful, and I will put you in the way to acquire friends and fortune."

"But how can I prove what I assert, when not a soul in this great city, except yourself, knows that such a being as Paul Mortvie exists?"

"You are a stranger here then?"

"The sun of to-day is the first that Paul Mortvie ever beheld shine upon these streets and dwellings."

"But you have lived somewhere before, Paul?"

"In a dream, good lady."

"You are a strange lad!" said Grace, not knowing what to think of him, and beginning to suspect some slight aberration of intellect. "Where have you been living? from what place came you last?"

"Now you demand my secret."

"Well, I cannot stop longer to talk with you here," said Grace; "but come and see me, at the De Vere Mansion, No. — Chestnut street, and I will confer with you further. Meantime, pray accept a slight present from one who means you well, and can give without feeling the loss."

And as she spoke, she handed Paul a very beautifully worked purse, containing several gold coins.

"Oh, lady," said Paul, betraying emotion, for the first time, "I cannot accept this from you!"

"Why not?"

"Because—because—I——"

And unable to say more, or repress his emotions, he turned away and hid his face in his hands.

"You must not offend me!" said Grace, quietly slipping the purse into the side-pocket of his coat.

"There, good-night, my noble lad! let me see you to-morrow;" and mounting her palfrey, she rode

quickly away, leaving the boy standing silent and motionless, with his face buried in his hands.

"Well," mused Leon Dupree, who had kept close against the wall, within a few feet of the speakers, and had not lost a word of the conversation, "this youth is at least a stranger to the parties, come from where he may; and he at least is innocent of playing a part as I suspected. Now then let me see if I cannot turn him to some account."

He quietly approached the youth, and laid his hand upon his shoulder. The boy started, looked up in surprise, and, seeing Leon Dupree, became very much agitated.

"Paul," said Leon, impressively, "you are known!"

"Sir!" exclaimed the youth, trying to recover himself, but trembling in every limb.

"A few minutes since," pursued Leon, "I left you in anger, and I was returning to apologize, when I found you in conversation with Miss De Vere: I stopped at the corner here, and heard all."

"Well?" gasped Paul, still trembling violently.

"You may be a stranger in the city—but the story that you have no home, nor friends, nor parents, is false. Ha! you start—you know I am right. Now do not attempt to deceive me, or you will get yourself into trouble. You, like many another scapegrace, have run away from your parents and friends; and it is my duty, as an honest citizen, to arrest you on suspicion, and hand you over to the police."

"Oh! sir——" began the boy—but Leon interrupted him.

"Listen," he said, "to what I have to say! It is my duty to have you arrested; but there are consider-

ations which may outweigh duty. In the first place, I feel for you, for I believe you have been badly treated : is it not so ?”

“It is,” answered Paul, averting his face, but regaining, in some considerable degree, his wonted composure.

“In the second place,” pursued the wily villain, “I have taken a liking to you, and have not the heart to do you an injury.”

“Oh ! sir—thanks !” responded Paul.

“In the third place,” Leon went on, “I know that you can serve me if you will ; and if you will only honestly, truly, and faithfully serve me, I will make your fortune for you in return. I am rich and able to perform all I promise. Come ! what say you ? will you serve me on these conditions ?”

“What am I to do ?” inquired Paul.

“Before I tell you, you must solemnly swear to keep my secret sacred, whether you consent to act for me or not.”

“I cannot consent to anything dishonest or dishonorable,” replied Paul.

“Nor would I have you. What I require is trifling, and concerns no one but myself : that is to say, my secret, in being kept, can injure no one, but the divulging of it would injure me.”

“In that case, I promise,” said Paul.

“Nay, you must swear.”

“I solemnly swear, so help me Heaven !” returned Paul.

“Now remember, if ever you break your oath, I shall call you to a terrible reckoning !”

“I have sworn, and my oath is sacred,” replied Paul.

"Well, what I want is, that you take service with this Miss De Vere—you can easily arrange it, for she is favorably disposed toward you—and report to me, at every convenient opportunity, everything you may hear her, or any one else, say of me."

"That is to say, play the spy upon her!" rejoined Paul, rather coldly.

"Not exactly—or, at least, only to a small extent," replied Leon; "only to that extent, in fact, which concerns me directly. The truth is, Paul," he added, "I suspect some parties of being leagued together to do me an injury, and I wish to know if my suspicions are well-founded, and, if so, to take such measures as will counteract their designs. I am sure there can be nothing reprehensible in this—for I do not intend them any wrong, and only seek to prevent them doing me wrong. The whole blame, you perceive, if there be any blame, must rest with them—for if they act fairly and honorably, you will so report them—and your report will thus render them a service, as well as myself, by clearing them of suspicion—and if they act not fairly and honorably, they deserve exposure, and you will still be doing right to put me on my guard against a covert enemy."

"As you state the matter, I cannot see that I should act dishonorably in doing what you require," said the boy.

"By no means, Paul—by no means!" returned Leon, in an animated tone. "Do you consent?"

"But perhaps Miss De Vere has no employment for me—at least none that I would like to engage in—for I should object to menial service."

"Let me see!" said Leon, musing. "Ah! I have it! Suppose you propose yourself as her page?"

"Her page!" repeated Paul, in surprise. "Do the rich ladies of this city have pages for attendants?"

"No! but Miss De Vere might be induced to have one, if only for the novelty of the thing—for she is the most eccentric being you ever saw, and does everything as totally different from anybody else as possible. Suppose you make the trial; and if she objects, she may herself propose something equally as clever. I know she has taken a fancy to you; and if she finds you wish to serve her, she will not let you go, depend upon it. Come! what say you?"

"And if I succeed?" said the youth.

"Then will I reward you beyond your most sanguine expectations."

"But you have not told me your name, nor where I can see you hereafter."

"You will not forget that you have solemnly sworn not to reveal aught of my design to a living mortal?"

"I will not forget," answered Paul.

"And you must not recognise me from anything that has occurred to night! and, above all, you must consider that your oath binds you not to make known the fact of ever having seen me near this dwelling!"

"I will mention nothing," replied Paul; "we will meet as total strangers."

"That is exactly what I require; and remember, I shall be liberal to reward and terrible to punish! If you betray me at any time, I will have such revenge as shall make you wish you had never been born!"

"I am no traitor," said Paul, coldly.

"I do not think you are, or ever will be," answered the other, "and I will trust you. My name is Leon Dupree. I am rich, and reside with my father, at

No. — Walnut street. I do not wish you to call upon me, however—at least for the present—for it might excite suspicion if you were seen; but if you take up your abode with Miss De Vere, I will manage to afford you an opportunity to communicate anything you may desire—for I am a frequent visitor at her mansion, and on good terms with her—though, for reasons of my own, I did not care to speak with her to night. Be cautious, be prudent, be discreet, and you shall have a warm friend in me; and if I do not make your fortune, then call me the most ungrateful of my kind. Come! what do you say?"

"I will do my best," replied Paul, positively.

"That is right, my lad!" returned Leon, seizing the hand of the youth and shaking it cordially; "that is right, Paul! we understand each other! By-the-by, where will you sleep to-night?"

"At one of the hotels."

"I will not offer you any more money to-night, as I know you have sufficient for your present necessities—but spend freely, Paul, and fear not that your bank will run short. Remember, you are henceforth in the service of one who never lets his friends want! To-morrow morning, at a proper hour, go boldly to Miss De Vere, and work upon her sympathies by whatever tale you choose, only be sure you do not fail in our design."

"If it be possible to succeed, trust me, I will not fail," said Paul.

"And you will not, I know," returned Leon; "for you have all the qualities of success—spirit, boldness, firmness, and intelligence—a happy combination. And now, as all is settled, I will bid you good-night; and

when next we meet, remember, we are strangers openly, but friends secretly."

"I should like to ask you a question before you go, if it be not impertinent!" said Paul.

"Say on."

"Who was the young man that has just died?"

"His name was Linden."

"He seems to have had a great many friends."

"Yes," answered Leon, with something like a sneer, "it seems so indeed! though neither he nor I knew it while he was living. Had they come sooner, they might have been of use to him—but buzzards, you know, only collect over a dead body. He had been wasting away with consumption for more than a year, without a friend near him except his sister; and when, a short time ago, in one of my charitable rounds, I discovered them, they were in absolute want of the necessaries of life. I was a stranger to them, and they were too proud to accept charity; but, by a ruse of my own, I succeeded in forcing upon them a small amount; and having, by almost daily visits, won their confidence in some degree, I was on the point of persuading them to remove from their miserable abode into more comfortable quarters—and I believe the poor sister had even gone to look at the place of my selection—when, alas! the poor brother, in a fit of coughing, ruptured an artery, and you know the rest. And now, since we understand each other, and are no longer strangers," pursued Leon, "I will explain what otherwise I would not. I know you think it strange that on my return I did not hasten into the dwelling; but the truth is, in order to conceal my charity in the first instance—that I might do a righteous act and

not be known in the matter—I gave the Lindens a wrong name, and they have only known me as Mr. Warren ; and discovering on my return, by the palfrey you were holding, that Miss De Vere was here, I did not wish to be seen by her, as she would know me as Dupree, which might lead to unpleasant confusion, and perhaps to the suspicion that I had had some sinister design upon these Lindens ; and not knowing also but that you were acquainted with Miss De Vere, I sounded you cautiously, to ascertain how the matter really stood. Is this explanation satisfactory, Paul ?”

“ Oh, yes, Mr. Dupree—I am very much obliged—I really had no right to inquire.”

“ Nay, I am glad you did, for it has afforded me an opportunity for explanation. I am close enough at times, as well as yourself, though frankness is one of my failings. I would go in now, but I could do no good ; and besides, the same objection just mentioned still remains—there are parties within who know me. How they all came to be here at this time I cannot conceive. Did they all come together, do you know ?”

“ They did not,” answered Paul. “ When I returned with the physician, the sister had not arrived ; but she came immediately after, in company with a lady ; and when they broke the news to her, she shrieked and fainted ; and Miss De Vere, riding past, heard her, and stopped to inquire of me what had happened ; and as she wished to go in, saying that she might do good, I volunteered to hold her horse. This is all I know of the matter.”

“ So,” muttered Leon, half aloud, “ it is not, perhaps, so bad as I thought.”

“ Do you not think Miss Linden very lovely ?” in-

quired Paul, carelessly. "I only saw her a moment—but it seemed to me she was very beautiful."

"She is very beautiful," answered Leon, quietly. And then, after a moment's pause, he added: "By-the-by, if you have nothing to detain you here, we may as well walk up the street together."

Paul assented; and turning up Fourth street, they kept company till they reached Spruce street.

"I must leave you here," said Leon; "I have an engagement. Remember my instructions; and till we meet again, and under different circumstances, adieu!"

He shook hands with Paul, and the two separated—Dupree hastening down Spruce street, and the youth passing slowly up Fourth street. But the moment Leon was out of sight, Paul cautiously returned to a point whence he could get a view of the plotting villain; and as soon as he considered the distance between them safe for his purpose, the boy again followed him. Through one street after another Paul traced Leon, till at last he saw him disappear in the dwelling of Mrs. Leslie. Then a fearful change came over the boy; and drawing himself up against the trunk of a tree, in deep shadow, he clinched his hands, and gnashed his teeth, and finally gave some vent to his emotions, to the rack-
ing anguish of his heart, in a bitter flood of tears.

"Ah! vile, deceiving, treacherous villain!" he muttered at length—"you little know whose friendship you have sought this night! you little know whose eye is upon you! It is the eye of scorn—of hate—of vengeance! Beware, vain fool, of the terrible hour of retribution!" With this the boy turned and hastened away

We will follow Leon Dupree.

CHAPTER XXI.

THE REBUFF.

THE door of Mrs. Leslie's dwelling was opened to the ring of Leon Dupree by the old negress.

"Is Mrs. Leslie at home?" he inquired.

"She am, sah—but she am 'gaged up stairs wid a young lady, sah."

"Tell her Mr. Warren wants a few minutes' conversation with her," rejoined Leon, as he pushed past the domestic and entered the parlor.

He took off his hat, threw himself upon the sofa, in a lounging attitude, and drummed on the floor with his foot till Mrs. Leslie made her appearance, which she did in about five minutes, looking pale, serious and excited. She did not greet him on her entrance, as was her custom, but quietly taking a seat, at some little distance, seemed to wait for him to open the conversation. Leon raised himself up, bestowed upon her a keen, searching glance, and in a cold, measured tone, said:

"Well, madam, what is the matter?"

"Do you not know?" returned Mrs. Leslie.

"I know that Villeta's brother is dead, and that she has come home with you," he replied, "but I do not know what has occurred to make such an alteration in you in so short a time. You were all smiles and politeness when I saw you last, and now you seem as grum and surly as a mastiff."

Mrs. Leslie arose from her seat, walked over to Leon, and fixing her eye searchingly upon him, said :

"Have you had the audacity, sir, to make a vile tool of me for a damnable purpose?"

"Good heavens! what do you mean?" demanded Leon, in a tone of surprise.

"How came Lionel Linden to die while his sister was away? and how came you to be present there, when you had agreed to be here? Was it for some purpose of murderous villainy that you induced me to persuade the sister to come home with me?"

"You amaze me! you take my breath! I do not know what you mean!" replied Leon, turning pale and beginning to grow excited.

"I confess I have been your tool for years, as I had been the tool of others before you," pursued Mrs. Leslie, with indignant vehemence; "I have kept your house, and watched over your victims—victims before you brought them here, which, if I did not make any better, I did not, thank God, make any worse—but when you blindly thought I would stoop so low in vice as to assist in the ruin of an innocent being, you made a fatal mistake—though I encouraged you to go on, for I wished to know how black a heart sends the blood through your vile body! and now I am wiser. Know then, sir, that I have so far acted in your scheme, because it suited my own purpose; and that I have brought Villeta Linden here, not to ruin, but to save her!"

"Are you mad?" exclaimed Léon, all amazement.

"No, I am not mad—or, if I am, I have reason enough left to thwart some of your intended villainy!"

"So," returned Leon, compressing his lips and

knitting his brows, but speaking in a tone of forced calmness, "I was right in my conjecture—you have betrayed me!"

"No, sir, in that conjecture you were wrong, as you have been in nearly everything else," replied Mrs. Leslie, with indignant hauteur.

"If you have not betrayed me, how came Miss De Vere, the lawyer Raymond, and the artist St. Cloud, to be at the house of the Lindens at the very hour I had proposed to accompany Villeta home from your dwelling?"

"I suppose they were brought there by the hand of Heaven, to be a witness of your villainy—your *crime*, it may be—even though they be yet ignorant of what was done and who it was that did it!"

"Have a care, Mrs. Leslie!" said Leon, warningly: "I have a good memory; and in the heat of your foolish anger, you may say what you would not like to have recalled."

"I say nothing, sir, that I do not mean!" rejoined the other, with flashing eyes, while her whole frame trembled with passionate excitement; "and I would to Heaven my words were scorpions, that every one might sting you to the quick!"

"Umph!" sneered Leon—"a woman in a passion should be forgiven all she says, on the ground that her temper upsets her reason and makes a fool of her—and no one should lay up malice against a fool—though too much unmeaning jargon is very trying to one's patience. Now, madam, under the presumption that your wits have not wholly deserted you, and that you will stand to some of your assertions in your cooler moments, I very humbly beg leave to know

what you mean by saying you suppose Heaven brought together these parties to witness my villainy—it may be my crime ?”

“How came you to be with Lionel Linden at the very time you had arranged to meet Villeta here ? and how happened he to rupture a blood vessel at the very moment when you were ready to have him die ?” demanded Mrs. Leslie.

“Well, now, you asked these questions before, I believe, or something similar ; and it strikes me you would have shown your good sense in waiting for an answer, before flying off at a tangent, and letting loose so much abuse, and getting yourself in such a heat—to say nothing of your insinuation, I may fairly call it accusation, that *I* had a hand in the death of that noble young man !”

“Take everything into consideration,” rejoined Mrs. Leslie, “I do believe you had a design upon his life ; and that, by a damnable plot, in which I worked as an innocent tool, you hastened his death !”

“*You ! an innocent tool ?—ha ! ha ! very good !*” sneeringly laughed Leon. “Really, you should put your virtue up at a premium, having had your own price so many times ! There—stop where you are !” added Dupree, as Mrs. Leslie, in an endeavor to keep her rage within bounds, clinched her hands and bit her lip, while every muscle of her face worked with the volcanic throes of the pent up passion. “Pray keep your temper, as I do mine, and sit down, and become rational, and I will give you a satisfactory explanation.

“You see, madam,” he continued, with a *sang froid* that showed him capable of becoming as cold-

blooded a villain as his father, "you do me great injustice with your suspicions; for not even my passionate love of Villeta—and that love, as I have acknowledged, is a kind of Vesuvius in my bosom—not even that love, I say, could have tempted me to injure Lionel, whom I also loved as a brother. It was certainly my intention to have called here for Villeta, for the purpose, as I told you before, of having a little private conversation with her on our way to her dwelling, by which I hoped to persuade her to take up her residence with you; but I had some business which detained me till I thought it probable she had gone home—and, still wishing to see her, I went to her house. I found Lionel alone, and much excited, I believe mostly on your account—though I failed to learn what had transpired during your visit—for he was speaking of you and Villeta, when he was suddenly seized with a fit of coughing, which terminated in a frightful hemorrhage of the lungs, and, in great alarm, I hurried out to summon help and a physician. This," concluded Leon, "is the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth, whether you choose to believe it or not."

It will be perceived that the story of Dupree—aside from his cool, collected, straight-forward manner of telling it—was supported by strong probability; and its effect was to stagger Mrs. Leslie, and tend to the overthrow of her well-grounded suspicions. Leon had framed his plot upon what he had witnessed of the great excitability of Lionel; he knew positively, from a remark made by the latter when he went to execute his design, that Mrs. Leslie had been there and taken Villeta away; he knew this could not have been done

without there having been something said to excite the emotions of the nervous invalid ; and therefore he argued that he might, with little or no risk of controversion, boldly venture the assertion that his death had been indirectly caused by excitement arising from what had gone before : while, on the other hand, Mrs. Leslie was prepared to believe his statement, from her own knowledge of what had occurred during her visit.

There being no principle in her nature which could sanction injustice, even toward an enemy, be that enemy never so great a villain—and believing that, to the extent of her suspicion and accusation of crime, she had done him wrong—she felt it her duty, in so much, to make reparation. So she said, in a modified tone, but still keeping her eye fixed searchingly upon the young villain :

“ Mr. Dupree, are you willing to swear you had no part in the death of Lionel Linden, except what you have mentioned ? ”

“ I am ! ” replied Leon, with the bold, unwavering look of injured innocence ; “ I will swear to it by whatever you think sacred ! Dictate the oath ! ”

“ Then I have certainly done you great injustice in that respect,” she rejoined.

“ Indeed you have, madam,” he replied, with secret exultation—for it did not suit his base purpose to have an open quarrel with one who, as matters stood, possessed the power to injure him. “ And I presume that, in the heat of your foolish passion,” he continued, “ you have done me irremediable mischief.”

“ All the mischief I have done you, you know,” she replied.

“ Have you not told Miss De Vere and others, that Warren and Dupree are one ? ”

"I have told that secret to no one, sir."

"Not even to Villeta?"

"Not even to Villeta."

"Then, madam, permit me to say, that I forgive you all the harsh language you have made use of in my presence alone, under the mistaken supposition that I had proved myself a villain."

"Stop!" said Mrs. Leslie, coldly: "I wish you to understand me clearly, before you make further display of the magnanimity of forgiveness. So far as I did you wrong, in supposing you hastened the death of Lionel Linden, I wish to apologize; but setting even that aside, I wish you to understand that I do not think I pronounced you a villain without just cause."

"What do you mean?"

"Remember Emily, Clara, and Marie!"

"Well, what of them?"

"Are they not the names of three of your victims? are they not the names of three young girls, whom, by your base arts and false promises, you ruined, body and soul?"

"Pshaw!" exclaimed Leon, with a shrug of contempt; "what are you talking about? have you turned moralist?"

"I have at least repented of my part in your iniquities, and resolved to serve you no more!" rejoined Mrs. Leslie, sternly. "Each one of these poor creatures in turn lived with me; each one then loved you well, and believed you meant her well, and I did not deceive her; and each one in turn was removed to make room for another. Where are they now? Emily is the tenant of a loathsome hell; Clara, lost beyond hope of redemption, is but a grade above

her, and fast descending to her level; and Marie is removed from the city, and feeding upon a hope that can never be realized, and will eventually come to the same awful end of all who are tempted from the narrow but pleasant path of virtue by such fiends in human form as your unworthy self! Thank God," continued Mrs. Leslie, earnestly, "I had no part in making them what they already were when you brought them here; and as it was then too late to save them, to restore them to innocence, I let them live on in their delusion."

"And being so *very innocent* yourself, your vanity was doubtless flattered by your superiority!" sneered Leon.

"Not so, sir!" answered Mrs. Leslie, sternly; "having suffered myself, through similar wrong, I knew how to feel for the victims of treachery."

"Indeed!" again sneered Leon. And then he added, with savage bitterness: "Excuse me, if, through your taunts, I forget I am a gentleman, and call you a base, wilful liar!"

"Call me anything but your friend!" rejoined Mrs. Leslie, growing indignantly calm in the exact ratio that Leon grew savagely heated. "*You* a gentleman, forsooth! Why, there is not one spark of honor in your composition."

"You are either a liar or a hypocrite!" pursued Dupree: "for you now pretend you sympathized with what you are pleased to term my victims, when you well know you always met me with smiles, and treated me as your friend."

"I did not then despise you as much as I do now," replied Mrs. Leslie; "for until you unfolded to me

your dark scheme against the lovely orphan, Villeta Linden, I did not know you were so utterly base and depraved."

"But even then you heard me with smiles, and concurred in all my plans," said Leon.

"How else could I have got at your plans, so as to be able to thwart them?" inquired Mrs. Leslie, quietly.

"D—m—n!" cried Leon, springing up in a rage: "then this is no sudden freak of yours?"

"Not altogether, sir!" answered Mrs. Leslie. "From the moment I heard you mention the name of Villeta Linden, I resolved to save her—for your own confession declared her innocent—and, with God's help, I will keep her so! She has had trouble enough, poor girl! and you will be wise to leave her in peace, and go your way, and see her no more."

"I do not wish to harm her," said Leon; "but see her again I must—and soon: I came to see her even now."

"You will not see her to-night, at all events," returned Mrs. Leslie, firmly; "and I warn you, that the very next time you approach her without my consent, she shall know it is Leon Dupree, and not Henry Warren, who addresses her."

"But what have I done, to cause this change in you?" inquired Leon. "You say that, from the moment of hearing her name, you resolved to save her; and yet, during my absence in the country, according to your own account, you went not near her; and at my request, this very day, you visited her and brought her home with you, expecting me to meet her here and go back alone with her; and now, because unfor-

fortunately her brother has chanced to die, you say I shall not see her."

"I have my reasons for everything I have done," said Mrs. Leslie, quietly; "but it is not my intention to enter into any explanation—at least with you."

"I trust you do not forget where you are living?" pursued Leon. "This house, and all it contains, belongs to my father and myself."

"I forget nothing—would to Heaven I could!" rejoined Mrs. Leslie. "The house belongs to your father; it was rented some four years ago, to me; and that same year I became acquainted with you, who proposed to give me the rent, and pay me handsomely besides, if I would take a young lady to board. I consented. That young lady was Emily. She lived here a year, and was succeeded by Clara, who remained till room was wanted for Marie, for whom the house was refurnished in more elegant style. I remember all, you see; and now I have the satisfaction to inform you, that I intend to seek other quarters, and take Villetta with me."

"You are determined to break with me then?"

"Such is my intention."

"Have I not always paid you well?"

"Yes, you have been very liberal with your gold, and have thus armed me for defence against yourself; and now, thank God, having enough to support me comfortably, I no longer need your aid."

"And so your morality sets in with your independence!" sneered Leon.

"Materially differing from yours," retorted Mrs. Leslie, "which, if it ever sets in at all, must set in with your poverty: that is to say, whenever it shall be

beyond your power to do evil, you will cease of necessity. It was oppression, sir, which drew me into the path of error—not, like yourself, a love of evil—and from the moment I can exist independently of evil associations, must I date my reform, or be unworthy of God's mercy!"

"And has that wonderful moment arrived, madam?"

"I trust it has."

"You intend to leave this house then?"

"I do—you shall have it within a week if you want it."

"But I do not, my dear madam," returned Leon, softening his tone and changing his whole manner.

"Come! what shall I say or do to make up our quarrel?—for you know, Mrs. Leslie, how highly I esteem you! You must not go away from here; and you must let me see Villeta; I will swear to comport myself in any manner you may direct. Oh! you know not how wildly, how madly, I love her!"

"Base, unworthy passion!" rejoined Mrs. Leslie; "such love as yours, Leon Dupree, instead of elevating and ennobling, would drag her down to perdition."

"No, no—by all that is sacred, I swear I will not wrong her!" returned Leon, passionately.

You may safely swear, for I shall stand between her and your vile machinations—but you know your intentions are not honorable."

"Hitherto they may not have been—I will admit this much—but henceforth they shall be!" said Leon, earnestly. "I will woo her as if she were a princess; and if I win her heart, she shall become my wife."

"I would see her in her grave first!" rejoined Mrs. Leslie.

"Why, what is she to you?"

"Everything—all I have to love. Her mother, if you must know all, was my bosom friend."

"Ha! indeed! This then accounts for your start of surprise when I mentioned her name; and yet you solemnly declared you had never seen her, and knew no one of the name of Linden!"

"And I told you the truth," replied Mrs. Leslie. "I did not know her, nor her father—but I knew her mother, in her girlhood, when I was young and innocent—I knew, in fact, Ellen Courtney, but not Ellen Linden. One word for all! Her brother, during the only interview I ever had with him, this very day, gave his lovely sister into my charge, and I promised to take care of her and protect her, and that pledge is sacred. Her brother is dead, and I now claim her as my adopted daughter; and no daughter of mine, were she clothed in beggar's rags, and were you rolling in untold wealth, should ever clasp your hand in the holy bond of marriage. Besides, I have sounded Villeta far enough to know she does not love Henry Warren, and you need not that I should tell you she would detest Leon Dupree. Go, sir—you have your answer."

"And you will not permit me to see her again?"

"Not to-night, at least."

"And you will tell her my name, and blacken my character, so that she will hate me?" said Leon.

"Perhaps not, unless you give me further cause. For my own sake, I would conceal much that is past."

"Well," said Leon, taking up his hat, "I shall obey you, and go; but I trust you will ere long give me permission to return, and see Villeta once more, even though it be for the last time. Believe me, I am not so base at heart as you think me. I have my errors

—but they are errors of impulse, of heated passion, rather than cold-blooded calculation. You, I know, possess a kind and generous heart, and will not betray my indiscretions. I have trusted you with many secrets ; and even though we never meet again as friends, I honestly believe you will take no advantage of that confidence. You can injure me if you will—but do not forget that I have it in my power to fearfully retaliate. You are excited to-night, and I will see you in your cooler moments. *Au revoir !*”

“Good night !” said Mrs. Leslie.

“So,” muttered Leon, clinching his hands, compressing his lips, and frowning blackly, as he hurried up the street, “I am defeated, defied, and threatened ! So much for trusting a *woman*—a thing of no more stability than a weather-vane. Fool—fool have I been, to put myself so much in her power ! for a word to Grace of this would ruin my hopes in that quarter forever. And she knows her power ; and she will use it, too, no matter what she now says to the contrary. Then as I shall have to bear the blame in the end, my best plan is to win the game, and win it boldly ; and if people must talk, and talk scandal, let them have a nine day’s wonder. Ah ! Mrs. Leslie, (shaking his fist at an imaginary object,) much as you know of me, there is, permit me to tell you, much more of me unknown ; and if I do not triumph over you yet, taking my revenge through sated passion, then call me fool as well as villain. Ah ! Villeta, I would have wooed you gently, and through tender love would I have won—and if you see my rougher nature now, then thank your friends ! You must and shall be mine, though all the powers of good and evil conspire against me !”

CHAPTER XXII.

MORE VILLAINY AFOOT.

BASIL DUPREE and Isaac Jacobs sat facing each other, and looking at each other by the feeble light of the pawnbroker's miserable lamp. The place was the little beggarly back room in which the Jew kept many of his valuables, and his valuable self during his hours of sleep—the time in our story was some several days from the death of Lionel Linden—the hour of night not far from twelve.

The parties had been conversing for some time—but it is sufficient for our purpose to record what follows.

“Put, mine Got!” exclaimed the Jew, angrily, in reply to some remark just made by Dupree—“if I vash knows noting, den I vash von fools all der times; put if I vash knows so mush ash von idiot, den I shwears you vash say you vill gifts me fifty dousand dollarsh for der certificates.”

“Yes—but hark ye, you avaricious old sinner!” returned Dupree: “I made it conditional on my getting the whole of the property. You are not such a fool, I hope, as to suppose I am going to pay you in advance for a scrap of paper that may be of no benefit to me after all!”

“How you vash means no penefits, eh?” inquired Isaac, anxiously.

“Why, suppose this girl can prove the marriage without the certificate?”

"Put she vash tells me, mit her own lips, dat she vash not knows nopody ash vash at der veddings of her faders and moders."

"That may all be; but if the parties are living, they will be found, trust the lawyers for that," rejoined Dupree. "And speaking of lawyers," he continued, "I have been to see Vincent, who is empowered to act as agent for the English trustees, and I assure you he is just as shrewd a man as I care to have dealings with, and so — honest that I dared not approach him with a bribe. I tried to make him believe this girl to be illegitimate—but he said he knew better, and he would take care to refute the slander before just such witnesses as would cut off my expectations of at least one-half of this fortune. Curse him! I would I had his heart's blood! And do you know, Isaac, (lowering his voice,) that I think he strongly suspects the hand we had in that Linden affair?"

"Eh! cood Lord!" ejaculated the pawnbroker, starting in alarm: "vat for you vash say dat?"

"Because he asked some very curious questions—questions of mysterious import—but which I fancied I understood, though I took — good care to appear very ignorant of his meaning, and very innocent."

"Put he vills not pe aples to broves noting?" returned the Jew, anxiously.

"Perhaps not, if we manage to get this Jack Guthrie safely out of the way, and you keep yourself quiet and on your guard."

"Der graves vash tells so mush ash mineself," said the money-lender, quickly. "Put he vash not knows me; he vash never shees me; and if he vash knows

me all der times, he vash never 'shpeaks me to knows vat goes on ven I vash in mine rooms here and in mine peds—oh, no !”

“You do not know what he knows or suspects,” said Dupree, coldly; “but do not flatter yourself, that if ever I get into a scrape on account of that affair, which was one of your own projecting, I will let you off safely. But come! to the point. Do you let me have this certificate; and besides swearing to shield you from all harm, I will also swear, on the honor of a gentleman, as I told you before, that if I by this means get possession of the whole of this property, I will pay over to you fifty thousand dollars in current funds.”

“Der honor of der shentlemans ish all very cood for some dings,” said old Jacobs, warily, “put der laws vash never makes it cood to pay der monish; and ven I sells, I vash always gets der monish, or der bonds so cood ash der monish. Dat ish fair pargains.”

“Then you are not willing to trust to my honor?”

“I never vash trusts to nōpody’s honor—so helps me !” returned Isaac. “Honor ish vort noting more ash von puffs of der preaths in der air, in der monish business. Mishter Dupree, I tells you so plain ash I vash shpeaks it, I vash co to you, and I vash say I haf von paper ash vill shtop der Lindens from brove dey ever vash haf faders and moders; and I vash ask you vat you gifs; and you vash ask me vat I takes; and I vash say fifty dousand dollarsh; and you vash say you gifs it; and now you vash vants it for shust noting at all, to pay in der honor of der shentlemans. I vills not trade so.”

“But, you old fool,” returned Dupree, angrily,

"cannot you understand, what I have twice explained to you, that this offer was made on condition of my getting the property, the Linden share, through this means? If there is other proof, this certificate is good for nothing; and would I not be a pretty simpleton to pay you for a thing of no value? Vincent says the marriage can be proved—perhaps he knows, perhaps he don't—but with even a possibility against me, I should not be justified by common sense in giving you a sum which is a small fortune of itself. And then only think how long a time must elapse before the claim of this girl can be set aside and the decree rendered in favor of my wife! And consider, also, the contingencies that may arise meantime! Remember, when you were at my house, not very long ago, there were living two Linden heirs; now there is only one; and how do I know that this one may not die too? By ——!" exclaimed Dupree, with a start, as a dark, damnable idea sprung up in his mind: "if this girl were out of the way, there would be no heirs! Eh? Jacobs—eh?"

"Put she ish not out of der vays!" said Isaac.

"But she might be put out of the way—eh?" rejoined Dupree, quickly. "Ah! Isaac, my old friend, this would be something like—something tangible in its results—something worth paying for—yes, by ——! Come, old fellow, you are good at scheming, and good at executing too—tell me! cannot we manage it between us in some way?"

"No!" replied the Jew, sharply—"I vash not takes der monish out of mine pockets to throws away for notings."

"How throw away? explain!"

"I haf dish certificates, dat ish vort monish—a great deal of monish—Fader Apraham only knows how mush monish it ish vort; and if you vash not puyt it, I villt co and sells it to der gals herself; and if she co dead, vat for it vash vort den you tells me?"

"Oho! I see!" said Dupree: "you have a keen eye to business, Isaac."

"I vash always minds der pusiness," replied Isaac, with a kind of chuckle.

"And so do I," rejoined the other; "and I always turn my eye to that which I think will return the most profit. By ——! the more I think of it, the more I am determined to have this girl out of the way."

"If you vash tries to kills her," said the Jew, angrily, "I villt co and tells her all apout it."

"You will, eh?" rejoined Dupree, with a dark frown, as he fixed his cold, devilish eyes steadily upon his companion in crime. "And all because I may not choose to purchase, at an exorbitant price, a scrap of paper which may be of no benefit to myself, and which you yourself stole!"

"Shust so, Mishter Dupree—shust so!" said the Jew, returning the savage glance of the other with a fiendish look of defiance. "You vash makes a great deal of monish vare I vash makes noting; and now you villt gif me some of der monish, or else I villt spoils all your plans mit der polishe—so helps me!"

"Umph! do you dare to threaten me, you old sinner!" said Dupree, half sneeringly, half savagely. "Why, you —— old reprobate! if you dare to foil a plan of mine, I will cut your throat and send you to the d——!"

"Yesh," almost chuckled Isaac, "you vash say so

von time pefore; and so I vash fix it dat ven I dies you vill hangs—dat ish der vay I makes mineself safes.”

“Ha! what do you mean?” asked Dupree, turning pale.

“I vash knows you pe not so mush cood dat you vash not shtops to take mine lifes,” grinned the pawnbroker; “and so I shust writes down all apout yourself and mineself, and vat ve vash do von times, and all der times, and I vash put dish paper away so safes ash never vash till I vill dies, and den it vills pe found, and it vill tells der story more straight ash me.”

“Why, you —— old scoundrel!” cried Dupree, starting up in rage and alarm: “this then will testify against me, die when you may?”

“Shust so!—che! che! che!—shust so!” chuckled Isaac. “Dat vash der vay I vash makes mineself safes. So long ash I vills lifs, der paper tells noting—put ven I coes dead, it shpeaks der truths.”

“Isaac,” rejoined Dupree, smothering his rage, resuming his seat, and speaking in a calm, quiet tone, “is it really true that you have written such a paper?”

“Holy Apraham curse mineself more ash der tuyvel, if it ish not so true ash you vash sits dere dish minutes!” replied the Jew, exultingly. “You vill kills me, eh? Den you hangs mit der ropes. Dat ish fair pargains.”

“But, my friend, do you not see that by this course you run the risk of being detected before you die, and of having your own neck stretched by the rope?”

“Eh! vat you means?” queried the pawnbroker, with a slight start.

“Suppose this paper should be found?—it implicates you as well as me.”

"Put I vash fix it so it vash not pe finds pefore I vash die mineselfs."

Dupree mused a moment, and then said, coldly :

"I am glad you have told me, old man, for now I know my course."

"Eh ! vat you vash do ?" inquired old Jacobs, with a show of uneasiness.

"What will I do ?" replied Dupree, sternly. "Listen ! I will tell you. At an early hour to-morrow morning, I will repair to a magistrate, and make a full confession of the whole transaction.

"Den you vills hangs mit der ropes," said the Jew.

"No, turning State's evidence will save me ; but you and Jack Guthrie will hang, and be —— to you !"

"Put you vills not do so !"

"As sure as you and I live, unless you produce that paper and destroy it this very night."

"Oh, cood Lord ! oh, Fader Apraham ! vat for I tells you ?"

"The devil prompted you, for he wants your soul, and will get it soon."

"Put you vash comes here for to kills Ploody Jack dish night," replied the Jew.

"And so I might have done, had he come before you exposed the trap you have set for my ruin," answered Dupree ; "but now, instead of killing him, I will leave you both to the hangman. My mind is made up—seek not to alter my determination—your days are numbered—to-morrow you will be arrested," added Dupree, rising as if to depart.

"Oh, mine Got ! I vash not dink you vash do so !" cried the Jew, in alarm. "Shpose I vash gets dish paper and gifs you—eh ?"

"You could write another : I will not be safe till I confess all. Besides, it is not in your power to get it to-night, and to-morrow morning I go to the magistrate."

"Oh, yesh!" exclaimed the Jew, in trepidation ; "if you vash shwears not to shpeaks of der pusiness, I vill gets it, and ve vill purns it to der smokes."

"But what of that? you could write another!" said Dupree.

"Put I vills not writes anoder—so helps me, Fader Abraham!" returned the pawnbroker, anxiously. "Oh! cood Mishter Dupree, I vash only means der joke all der times."

"A ——— ugly way of joking!" answered Dupree. "But never mind this time! Produce the paper, and let me burn it, and all shall be forgotten."

"Put den you vill kills me!" whined old Jacobs.

"No, you are not worth the risk!" sneered Dupree.

After some further hesitation, and assurance that no harm should come to him, the Jew went to his old bed, and drew forth the paper from the mattress, where he had hid it, both for greater security and the convenience of getting and destroying it in the event of his place being searched during his lifetime. On getting possession of the confession, and finding it was written in German, which he did not understand, Dupree immediately folded and secured it in his pocket, observing :

"I will take care of this, Isaac—it will be of service to me."

"Put, mine Got! vat for you vash not purns it now?" cried the Jew, in alarm. "Somepody vash

gets der secrets, and den ve poth hangs mit der ropes !”

“No danger, my worthy friend—give yourself no uneasiness !” sneered Dupree. “I will take care that no one shall see it, so long as you may find it to your interest to act in accordance with my wishes.”

“Vat you means ?” demanded the old man, in alarm.

“Why, Isaac, the truth is, I think you have overreached yourself, and are now in my power,” returned Dupree, quietly.

“Eh ! holy Moshes ! how vash I ?”

“You know best what you have written in this paper, and signed with your own name ; but if it is what I think it is, a few judicious erasures may render it such an instrument as will only criminate yourself and Jack Guthrie, leaving me out of the question altogether. Isaac, it is very dangerous to play with edge tools ; and it is sheer folly for a man of your age to run a tilt of cunning with a man like myself, in the very prime of life—you are sure of being worsted in the end.”

It was no part of Dupree’s plan to make any use of the paper—for he well knew that he could not criminate the Jew without running a fearful risk himself—but he hoped to intimidate the old man, and in this he succeeded.

“Oh, mine Got !” cried the money-lender, clasping his bony hands, and assuming an attitude of supplication : “you vills not do so, cood Mishter Dupree ! oh, Holy Apraham ! you vills not do so dish time !”

“Yes, you villain !” answered Dupree, harshly—“I will do just so. I will have you arrested, tried, and hung for murder ! and this very document shall be the means of your conviction !”

"Oh, mine Got! mine Got! cood Lord! creat Moshes! holy Apraham!" cried the pawnbroker, trembling all over, and half distracted with terror.

"And yet," added Dupree, in a tone less harsh, "I will spare you, on one condition."

"Shpeaks it!" gasped the other.

"Contrive some plan to get this girl, this Villeta Linden, out of the way, and I solemnly promise, not only that your life shall be secure, but that I will give you a sum in itself a fortune."

"Vat you gifs?" demanded old Jacobs, eagerly, all considerations of personal danger becoming absorbed by the one great ruling thought of his life—personal gain. And gain, too, coupled with his monomaniac idea of revenge: for let the reader not lose sight of the fact, that Villeta Linden was a descendant, on her father's side, of Hagar Jacobs, the hated sister of Isaac; and that, because of this, he would gladly have taken her life, only that her death might double the portion of the wife and son of Dupree, who were also descendants of the same detested Hagar; and that he first wished to make sure of a large sum from Basil Dupree for the certificate which had so mysteriously come into his possession: by all of which, it will be seen, he was placed in a very perplexing quandary—though, under the circumstances, inclining to the belief that his better plan would be to unite his gain with his revenge. "Eh! vat. you gifs?" he repeated.

"Why, if you will manage to put this girl as safely out of the way as her father, and without my having a hand in it, I will give you the fifty thousand dollars I promised," replied Dupree.

"You vills gifs seventy-five, eh?" queried Isaac, with grasping eagerness.

"No—fifty."

"Oh, yesh—you vills gifs seventy-five?"

"Well, then, do your work soon, and sure, and without blunder, and have your own price."

"Put vat vills make you pays der monish?" inquired the Jew, anxiously.

"My honor. You must trust to that!" he added, as he saw an expression of dissatisfaction settle upon the harsh, wrinkled features of his companion in crime. "Remember! I have your confession in my pocket, and I will use it if you refuse."

"Oh, mine Got!" groaned the Jew; "I vills not shleeps no more if you vash not purns dat."

"The moment the girl is dead, I will burn it—I swear it, by my hopes of life!" said Dupree.

"But how I vash do it?" returned the Jew, in perplexity. "If I vash so young as von times, den I vash do it; put now I ish so olds ash—"

"Cannot you get Bloody Jack to help you, for a consideration?" interrupted Dupree. "We might spare him now, and silence him afterward."

"Oh, yesh, dat ish cood—you ish von mans among der millions!" cried the Jew, delightedly. "Yesh, Ploody Jack vills do—che! che! che! Put vy he vash not comes, eh?"

"It is time," said Dupree, looking at his watch; "it is already past twelve o'clock. I hope he will not fail us. Ha! ha!" he laughed; "how we scheme—eh! Isaac? An hour ago we were ready and waiting to send him to kingdom come; and now we want to send him to send another there first."

"Che! che! che!" chuckled the money-lender—"dish ish von very queer world—very queer—che! che! che!" Fader Apraham knows dat. Oh, how I vash likes to lifs in dish queer world! der cood Lord gifs his old servant fifty years pefore he vash calls mineselfs, and I vills pray so mush as never vash."

"By-the-by, Isaac, you may as well let me have that certificate; it can no longer be of use to you; and perhaps my reading of it will suggest something for our mutual benefit."

"Vat you gifs, eh?" demanded the other, with his usual avaricious eagerness: "vat you gifs, and pays dish minutes, eh?"

"Why," said Dupree, musingly, "just to make it interesting, and reward you for your trouble, I will give you my check for five hundred dollars."

"Von dousand I gives it."

"Very well—it is a bargain. I have a blank here: get me pen, ink, and sand, and I will fill it out at once."

The Jew hastened to produce the writing-materials; and while Dupree wrote, he unlocked his safe, and brought forth, not the genuine certificate, but the one he had forged, according to a design made known in a previous chapter. Dupree filled out the blank with ink, till he came to the name, when, wiping his pen hastily, and wetting it with his mouth, he signed it in water, and immediately shook over it the black sand, which, adhering, gave it the appearance of ink. They exchanged papers, each highly delighted at his own cunning in outwitting the other. As the Jew, after seeing the amount of the check was right, carefully folded and placed it in his safe, he chuckled to himself, and muttered in German:

"Cheat old Isaac, will he! get the better of a man who has seen ninety-and-five years, eh! Father Abraham forbid! He's got the forged paper, and the genuine one is here, if ever I want to make use of it."

"Ha! ha!" laughed Dupree to himself—"the old scoundrel is not so smart as he thinks! How astonished he will be when he presents that check at the bank and finds no signature to it!"

"Isaac," he said aloud, as he glanced at the names of the witnesses on the marriage certificate, "I have it! I have it! If Jack will only come and join us in our scheme, we can do it bravely!"

At this moment three low taps on the outer door announced that Jack Guthrie was at hand.

And as the Jew admits the old sailor, let us withdraw, because it is not our purpose to report the conversation of that trio of villains—but the curious reader shall see the results of that conference, if he will but have patience and read on to the close.

CHAPTER XXIII.

CONSCIENCE REPROVES.

●SOMETHING more than a week had passed away from the death of Lionel Linden, and Villeta, dressed in deep mourning, was seated by the open window, in the elegant little parlor of the house still occupied by Mrs. Leslie. Never had she looked more fascinating, more heavenly, than now—for the marble paleness of her features, contrasting with her black habiliments

of woe, seemed to throw off an unearthly light—and as you gazed upon her lovely countenance, with its sad, earnest, speaking, deep blue eyes, with the golden hair crowning her head and looking like a halo, you could easily fancy you beheld an angelic spirit imprisoned in an earthly form.

The past few days had been days of exciting events to Villeta, and scarcely till now had she found herself alone with her thoughts since the death of her beloved brother. That brother had been consigned to his final resting place, but not as one poor and friendless. His remains had been taken charge of by friends, Villeta scarcely knew who ; the funeral sermon had been preached in a neighbouring church ; the coffin had been as costly as affection could desire ; the funeral train, as it moved through the city, to a distant but beautiful cemetery, had been long, and no empty pageant ; and many strange voices had spoken to her gentle words of sympathy and condolence. Besides all these external marks of sympathy and respect, Villeta had experienced the consolation of affectionate regard from Grace De Vere and Mrs. Leslie, not to speak of the brotherly kindness of Julian St. Cloud and Herbert Raymond, and her spirit had been strengthened with the knowledge that she was no longer a friendless being, doomed to struggle alone with her grief and poverty.

Still she was very sad ; for the last tie of kindred had been severed—the last of her race, so to speak, was gone—her brother, her dearly beloved brother, at least all of him that was mortal, was quietly resting in the cold earth, and would soon mingle with the dust around him, or return to the living ele-

ments from which he had sprung, but would be Lionel Linden on earth no more forever. And yet she believed, she felt, she *knew* that he was not where they had laid his mortal remains; she knew he had risen above death, immortal as the angels; she knew he was now beyond the miseries of earth; she thought it possible his spirit might still be with her; she had seen him once, surrounded by a shining throng—and, whatever others might think, she knew it was no illusion of fancy, but a sublime and holy truth; and therefore she thought it was wrong, because selfish, to grieve and repine at what, if a loss to her, was a gain to him.

Villeta was sitting alone, and for more than an hour had been alone, silently communing with herself, when Mrs. Leslie, who had been out on business, entered the parlor with a somewhat nervous step, and, seating herself by the gentle mourner, gazed fondly, sadly and anxiously into her pale, sweet face.

"You look troubled, my dear friend," said Villeta, in surprise: "has anything happened to give you pain or uneasiness?"

"My dear child," answered Mrs. Leslie, with considerable emotion, "I have been thinking for some days that we ought to part—but not till this moment have I been able to summon sufficient resolution to tell you so."

"Part!" echoed Villeta, with a start. "Why, Mrs. Leslie, what do you mean? what has happened?"

"Oh, my dear, sweet, innocent child, you do not know me—you do not know what a wretch I have been!" said Mrs. Leslie, bursting into tears. "You must leave me, Villeta—you must fly from me—I am

no fit associate for you, and those who are now your friends. It almost breaks my heart to tell you this—I meant to have kept it from you—but my guilty soul will give me no peace; and now I confess, through compulsion, as one on the rack.”

“Confess what?” said Villeta, excitedly; “what have you done?”

“I have lived a life of sin and guilt, Villeta, ever since I left England. It was a knowledge of this which kept me back from your sweet mother—it is this horrible truth which rises up as an eternal barrier between us. Leave me, Villeta—fly from me—shun me—go and make your home with the innocent and virtuous! and if your gentle heart can still pity, rather than loathe, the wretched being before you, remember me in your prayers!”

“Why, Mrs. Leslie, how wildly you talk!” exclaimed Villeta, beginning to grow alarmed. “Oh! speak—tell me—what have you done? what awful crime have you committed, that you should bid me tear myself away from the kindest friend I ever had?”

“I cannot tell you face-to-face, with those sweet, innocent eyes of yours fixed upon me; but the record is here—I have prepared it for your gaze—and when you shall have read it, I will return to you.”

And as she spoke, Mrs. Leslie placed a letter in the hand of Villeta, and hastily left the room. Villeta opened it, with a throbbing heart, and read the darker history of Margaret Colonnell—for the name of Leslie had been assumed from one who had given her no legal claim to the appellation. This history we need not transcribe. It was simply the confession of one who had, at an early age, swerved from the path of

virtue, and had since led a somewhat wild and dissolute life, and had deeply sinned against herself and society, but had never stooped to crime. It was the confession of a repentant woman, whose tears of contrition had put many a blot upon the otherwise fair page—and, what was of far higher importance, had perhaps at the same moment blotted many a dark record from the Great Book of Life, that it might not stand against her in the Eternal Hereafter.

Villeta read with astonishment, pity and pain; she read and wept; she read the letter thrice through; and then starting up impulsively, she hastily sought the author. She found Mrs. Leslie in her boudoir, her face buried in her handkerchief, and weeping bitterly. She did not hear Villeta enter, and the first intimation she had of her presence, the arms of the lovely orphan were around her neck, and that lovely face was pillowed upon her bosom.

"Oh! Mrs. Leslie," sobbed Villeta, "ask me not to leave you—but let me stay, and love, and comfort you!"

"Have you read all?" chokingly inquired Mrs. Leslie, as she impulsively strove to put the fair girl from her, as if she felt that her own touch might prove contamination.

"Yes, I have read all, dear madam, thrice," returned Villeta. "You have erred—you have sinned—but you have also repented, and God has forgiven you."

"Oh, no—that cannot be!" sobbed Mrs. Leslie. "God has not forgiven me—perhaps He never will."

"Oh, be not unjust to your Maker!" said Villeta, solemnly. "Would you not forgive an erring but repentant mortal?"

"Perhaps I might—but I am human."

"And therefore imperfect. If the little good in the creature can forgive, how much more shall He forgive in whom there is no evil? Is the Maker less than the made? is there more of divine in the creature than the Creator?"

"But you, sweet child—do you not despise me?" sobbed Mrs. Leslie.

"No, I love you more than ever—for now I know how you have suffered, and how much you need the consolation of a sympathetic friend."

"Oh! Villeta, sweet angel, God bless you! You unnerve me!" pursued Mrs. Leslie, in a choking voice. "I was not prepared for this; for though I did not think you would treat me harshly—knowing it was not in your nature—I yet thought you would fear me, even though you pitied, and withdraw from me as from a contagion."

"I am sorry, my dear friend," replied Villeta, in a reproachful tone, "that you should have formed so unfavorable an opinion of me."

"Oh! sweet girl, view it not in that light! What I expected was justice—justice to yourself and friends who are innocent—justice to myself who have sinned."

"But you misjudged me, dear madam, for I will not leave you," said Villeta.

"But you forget, dear girl, that the stain upon my character may be communicated to yours by association. Remember who you are, and what you may be; remember you are not now unknown and friendless—and that, ere long, by this turn of fortune in your favor, you may take a position with the richest and proudest of the land!"

"I will remain with you," rejoined Villeta, positively: "whatever may be my position now or hereafter, I will not stand aloof from one who came to me with the open hand of friendship in my hour of sorrow: nor would I forget the friend my mother loved, even were that friend prostrate beneath the scorn and contempt of mankind."

"Oh! sweet, noble girl, how you make me love you!" cried Mrs. Leslie, impulsively catching Villeta to her heart and bursting into tears. "But you know not all," she sobbed; "and now I dare not tell you all—for you might at last despise me, and withdraw from me, and that now would break my heart!"

"Tell me nothing then," said Villeta; "keep all your secrets to yourself: I will trust you for the future, whatever may have happened in the past."

"But we must leave this house, and at once, Villeta," said Mrs. Leslie, hastily drying her tears. "Shall I tell you why?"

"Is it a part of your secret?"

"It is."

"Then tell me nothing, but make whatever change you desire: let me be ignorant of anything that will give you pain."

"God bless you, sweet angel! God bless you!" rejoined Mrs. Leslie, with great emotion. "Oh, what a treasure have I found in you! You will save me yet—I feel it in my soul. I will go forth at once, and seek a place where I can dwell in peace, disturbed by no unpleasant memories."

At this moment the servant entered the apartment, and brought the warm blood to the pale cheek of Villeta, by the announcement that Julian St. Cloud was in the parlor below and desired to see her.

"Ah! sweet child," said Mrs. Leslie, "if you can only love him as he loves you, your life of happiness has just begun—for he is handsome and gifted, and has a soul of honor, or I know nothing of human nature."

Villeta made no reply—but turned, in some confusion, and hastily quitted the apartment.

CHAPTER XXIV.

THE LOVERS.

WHAT is love? who can define it? We see its action upon others—we feel its action upon ourselves—and yet who can say what it is, how it originates, or where it exists?

It has a grasp upon our spirit, which draws it to another spirit, as the loadstone attracts the responsive steel; and yet we can see not by what means—know not by what cause. It is spontaneous in its origination, subtile in its action, mysterious in its development, and powerful in its effects. It is the master passion of the human soul—the highest, purest, holiest. It is the connecting link between man and spirit, spirit and angel, angel and God. But who can define it?

Villeta loved, and loved Julian St. Cloud. Let not this announcement, following so close upon the death of her brother, shock the sober propriety of our most sober of readers—for the fair girl was no more to blame for this spontaneous reaching forth of her soul to mingle with its affinity, than is the magnet for its

invisible grasp upon the needle. It was a passion not of the will—its emotions were beyond control.

Nor was its origin so recent as the reader may for a moment suppose. Let him recall the conversation between Villeta and Leon, in an early chapter of our story, and he can bear witness to her acknowledgment that she had seen one being who had excited an emotion in her breast to which she had before been a stranger. That being was Julian St. Cloud. She had met him in the street, she had gazed upon him for a moment, she had felt her soul thrill with a strange emotion, and she had lost sight of him as she believed forever. She knew not who he was, whence he came, or whither he went—she only knew she had seen one whose image, by some wonderful power, was in a moment so stamped upon the memory of the soul, that it ever after stood out bright and glorious, undimmed by the cloud of darker events which swept over it. We have shown that he had remembered her, and, by his art, had transferred her lovely image to an exterior form—and she, from the same mysterious cause, had remembered him and kept his image sacred in her heart. The unexpected meeting of the parties in the chamber of death we have shown. The principle of love did not generate there—it was only awakened from its dormant state—roused from a passive into an active existence. The conduct of Julian on that painful occasion was noble; the hand of friendship was extended at a moment when the fond ties of affection, quickened by death, placed the soul in its deepest want of human sympathy; his friendship was given at a moment of all others when the heart of the mourner was most susceptible to human kindness; and

where another would have won gratitude for gentle words and noble deeds, Julian won love.

Yes, from that moment Villeta Linden loved Julian St. Cloud. Yet not in that moment did she think of it—not in that moment did she know it. She felt strangely, through a combination of strange emotions—but her vital powers were too much exhausted by grief to permit her to analyze her feelings. A cloud was upon her spirit—but through a rift in that cloud streamed a soft and soothing light, though the mind was too much depressed to trace that light to its source.

Since that night of sorrow, Villeta had seen and conversed with Julian at different times; and though their conversation had never touched upon love, but had ever been upon matters of the most serious import, yet soul had spoken to soul in a language which required no external signs to convey a truth, a sublime and holy truth, to the innermost depths of being.

And now, as Villeta entered the parlor where Julian sat awaiting her, she felt not a little embarrassed by the consciousness of a something which she was unable to define; and as he arose and came forward to greet her, with his handsome, manly features all aglow, she felt the warm blood rush upward and press upon her brain, till the room seemed to swim around her, and objects for the moment grew dim and indistinct.

"Pardon me, Miss Linden," said Julian, in a low and somewhat tremulous tone, "if I seem in any manner intrusive! Great sorrows, like yours, fill the soul with heavy thoughts, and create a desire for silence and solitude; but I know, from sad experience, it is not always best to indulge our grief beyond a certain

degree, because by so doing we enervate both body and mind and prolong our sufferings. It is right and proper we should grieve for the loss of our friends—for it is a tribute of affection due to the memories of those we loved while with us—but it is also right and proper we should remember that excessive grief cannot be of any benefit to them, and must certainly be of injury to ourselves and to the living friends who sympathize with us."

"Your remarks are correct, Mr. St. Cloud," sighed Villeta, as she quietly seated herself; "but it is easier, I find, to assent to a philosophical truth, than to act out the truth of a philosophy at war with the feelings which govern. However, I do earnestly endeavor to be resigned to the will of Him who hath seen proper to remove my friends; but the death of my noble brother, though long anticipated, was a terrible shock to me—the more terrible that I was not with him in his last moments."

"It was indeed a terrible blow," responded Julian, in a tone of earnest sympathy, "and I felt for you from my very soul. But you must try and console yourself with the reflection, that here on earth it was his hard fate to languish and suffer and look forward to death as a release from trouble and pain; and may we not safely trust that he is now living in a better world? in a world where sickness, pain and death are unknown?"

"Oh, yes," said Villeta, "I know he is better off than he could be here, and the thought brings joy to my soul even in the midst of my grief."

"I am glad to hear you speak thus," returned Julian, "for it shows the strength of the Christian's hope to

sustain us in our hours of deepest affliction and buoy us above the terrors of death."

In this vein the conversation was carried on for some time longer, when gradually it took a turn, and Julian said, in a voice tremulous with emotion :

"Little did I think, Miss Linden, when I responded to the call of distress and entered the apartment where your brother expired, that I was about to meet, in the only living mourner of the deceased, a being whose image had long been enshrined in my heart."

"I do not think I understand you," said Villeta, turning slightly pale.

"I mean that we did not meet in that solemn chamber of death for the first time," replied Julian, earnestly. "No, Miss Linden, we had met before—a year before. You probably do not remember the occasion—how should you?—but to me our first meeting was an event never to be forgotten. In a single moment your image became so vividly impressed upon my mind, that I do not think it would ever have been erased by time, even had I never looked upon you again. Judge then of my surprise, when, in that chamber of death, while waiting for the return of one whom I supposed to be a stranger, I casually took up a painting, and beheld the likeness of the being whose remembrance had often been present in my waking thoughts, and whose bright image had often mingled in my dreams!—and when I was told it was the likeness of the sister of the deceased, I could not credit the assertion—for somehow, I know not how, I had come to look upon you as something more than mortal."

While Julian was speaking, Villeta became much agitated, and her sweet features flushed and paled alternately. She ventured no reply, however; and after gazing fondly upon her for a few moments, in silence, he inquired:

"Will you tell me the history of that painting?"

"All I know of it," answered Villeta, "is that it was one evening brought to me by a gentleman of the name of Warren, who said it was a likeness of myself, and that he had himself painted it from memory."

"Warren!" returned Julian, in a tone of surprise; "was this the name of the gentleman who brought it to you and claimed to be the artist?"

"Yes—do you know him?"

"I know no one of that name," replied Julian. "Is he a friend of yours?"

"He was very kind to my poor brother and myself, and therefore I fear I should do wrong not to call him a friend."

"Have you seen him lately?"

"I have not seen him since the death of my brother—though Mrs. Leslie tells me he called here the same evening, and was very anxious to speak with me—but not considering me in a proper condition to see any one, she made serious objections, and he went away, apparently offended, and has not called since."

"Does Mrs. Leslie know anything of him?" inquired Julian.

"Oh, yes—he is her kinsman, I believe."

"Strange!" mused Julian, as he remembered to whom he had sold the painting, and the promise that

had been exacted of him, that, see it where he might, he should not claim the execution as his own—a promise from which, under the circumstances, he would gladly now have given much to be released. “But,” he added, mentally, “if my promise binds me not to reveal the name of the artist, I certainly am not bound to connive at villainy, and I think I see something here that is not as it should be. Who is this Warren? He cannot be a gentleman, for no gentleman would sail under false colors—no gentleman would lay claim to merit not his own. And if he would deceive in one thing, he certainly would in another. Why did Leon Dupree give two hundred dollars for the picture? Did he purchase it for himself, or for a friend? If for himself, then is he the Mr. Warren; and thus, being guilty of a double deception, must have a sinister purpose in view, is a villain at heart, and deserves exposure.”

“Pardon me, Miss Linden,” he said, aloud, “if I seem inquisitive! but I have an honest motive in pushing my inquiries. Was not this Mr. Warren present at the moment when your brother was attacked?”

“So I was informed by Mrs. Morley.”

“Why did he leave so suddenly?”

“He went for a physician.”

“But did not return?”

“I did not see him.”

“Nor I, and I remained there through the night,” said Julian. “Now is it not a little singular that he did not return, Miss Linden?”

“Good heavens! what do you mean?” cried Villeta, with a start.

“Why, to tell you the truth, I do not think Warren

was his name; and if it be as I suspect, there were present those who might have recognised him, which I think he discovered in time to avoid an unpleasant exposure."

"Indeed, Mr. St. Cloud, you amaze me! If you think Warren an assumed name, what is his right one?"

"Before I tell you what I suspect, will you be kind enough to describe this Mr. Warren's personal appearance?"

Villeta did so.

"Your description of Mr. Warren, Miss Linden," rejoined Julian, "does ample justice to the personal appearance of Leon Dupree."

"Leon Dupree!" exclaimed Villeta, all amazement: "do you mean the son of Basil Dupree?"

"Such, I am told, is his father's name."

"And do you think this Henry Warren and Leon Dupree are one and the same person?"

"I am greatly inclined to think so."

"Indeed!" said Villeta, with a start, as at the instant she recalled the interview in which she had hinted to her guest her suspicions of Basil Dupree, and remembered how suddenly he had discovered an engagement which had compelled him to leave at once: "Can it be possible! Oh! Mr. St. Cloud, why do you think this Warren and Dupree one and the same?"

"I have reasons for thinking so, Miss Linden, and I would I were at liberty to speak freely; but a promise, made to a certain party at a certain time, restrains me in part—though I trust I shall be able to make you understand all I wish to convey without breaking my plighted word. I never made a promise with the

intention of shielding villainy, and therefore I feel justified in what I am about to say. In the first place, I will state that, to my certain knowledge, the painting presented to you by Mr. Warren——”

“ You mistake, Mr. St. Cloud,” interrupted Villeta ; “ the picture in question was never presented to me, but merely left in my possession till the owner should see proper to call for it.”

“ Very well, let the picture be owned by whom it may,” pursued Julian, “ I wish to state, positively, that it was never painted by this Mr. Warren, and in setting up his claim to be the artist he told a deliberate falsehood. Secondly, that picture, not a month since, was owned by, and was in possession of, Leon Dupree. Thirdly, your description of the personal appearance of Henry Warren is a correct description of Leon Dupree. Fourthly, if Henry Warren and Leon Dupree be one and the same person, it is perfectly natural he should not have returned to your dwelling while it was occupied by persons with whom he is acquainted. Put all these facts together, Miss Linden, and what do you make of them ?”

“ Oh, you startle me, Mr. St. Cloud !” said Villeta, with an anxious, troubled look. “ But be this person Warren or Dupree, what motive could he have in deceiving me ?”

“ Can you think of no motive ?” returned Julian.

Instantly the pale features of the lovely mourner took a crimson hue, and she became greatly agitated, and her eyes sought the ground—for she remembered what had passed between herself and the person she had known as Warren. Perceiving the embarrassment and confusion which his question had occasioned, Julian hastened to relieve her, by adding :

"It is not always an easy matter to divine the motives of any one who practices deception ; but in a conversation with Mr. Raymond, I learned that the mother of Leon Dupree was own cousin to your father, and ——"

"Indeed !" interrupted Villeta—"own cousin to my father, did you say?"

"So he told me."

"I am astonished—I never knew this. And then Leon Dupree is second cousin to myself?"

"Yes! and if his mother were removed, would be joint heir with you in the Ackland estate. Now it is possible he knew this, and his motive might have been to unite his fortune with yours."

"But no," answered Villeta, thoughtfully, "after all, Warren and Dupree cannot be one—for Mrs. Leslie would not deceive me, and she not only knows him as Warren, but is also related to him. Ha! good heavens!" she exclaimed, the next moment, as she called to mind Mrs. Leslie's confusion when she had first spoken to her of the relationship, and remembered that even after her written confession she had declared she had kept something back which she was afraid to reveal: "I may have been deceived by all parties."

"If you think Mrs. Leslie has plotted against you and deceived you, Miss Linden, for the love of Heaven, stay not another hour beneath her roof!" said Julian, earnestly.

"Oh! she is my friend, whatever she may have done," returned Villeta, warmly. "If she has deceived me in this matter, she has had a good motive for her conduct, I am certain ; but I shall ask her for an explanation."

"Pray do so now, Miss Linden—for I feel most deeply interested in this mystery, and would like to see it cleared up."

"I think I had better speak to her when no one else is present," replied Villeta; "for she is very sensitive, and anything said before a third party might give her pain, and we should never wound the feelings of our friends."

At this moment a splendid private carriage, with driver and footman in livery, stopped before the door; and scarcely had the wheels ceased rolling, when Grace De Vere, without waiting for the assistance of her attendant, sprung lightly to the ground, and came bounding into the house.

CHAPTER XXV.

FRESH SUSPICIONS.

"Oho!" she said, with her usual gayety, stopping short at the threshold of the parlor—"I am *de trop*—one too many here, or my mathematical calculations are sadly at fault. Ah!" she cried, in the very next breath, as she darted forward, threw her arms around Villeta, and kissed her fondly—"I have brought the rose to your cheek, sweet sister, and it becomes you more than the pale lily; and if I can only live to see your crushed heart revive and bloom anew, I shall be very happy. Mr. St. Cloud, (turning to Julian, and offering her hand,) I am delighted to meet you here—I am, upon my soul! not because I think you the *best*

man in the world, but because I think Villeta thinks so, which on her account is better still."

"Oh, Grace!" exclaimed Villeta, overwhelmed with confusion.

"There! look at her dear, sweet face now, Mr. St. Cloud, and say I am not an artist if you dare! Can you, with all your practice and knowledge, put on a more *natural* color than that? or a more beautiful?"

"There is no artist like nature," smiled Julian, his own features deeply flushed.

"There, come, sweet sister," pursued Grace, winding her arm around the slender waist of Villeta, and again kissing her fondly, "do not think me rude or devoid of feeling! I only want to tease you out of some of your sad thoughts, by telling you that Julian St. Cloud loves you dearly, as well as myself."

"Dear sister, do not talk so!" pleaded Villeta; still confused and embarrassed.

"Well, I will not—though you must not mind my nonsense, which is equivalent to telling you not to mind anything I say—for dear Papa Vincent (bless his honest heart! though he is a lawyer) thinks I talk nothing else. And speaking of him, I saw him this morning; and though he has heard nothing new, he is sanguine of finding somebody who can prove the marriage of your parents, which he says is all that is necessary to place you in possession of a fortune. He has advertised in all the papers in this city, New York, and Boston; and, depend upon it, somebody will be found who knows something of the matter, or I shall be tempted to paint wrinkles in my face, put on clerical robes, and see if I cannot personate the good parson myself."

"I scarcely give the matter a thought, Grace," replied Villeta.

"Well, you will, when you grow less sorrowful—if not for yourself, at least for your friends. Only think, if you were rich, how many people you could make happy!"

"Ah! pardon me, dear Grace! I have been selfish not to think of others. I will try and be more like you, who seem to think more of others than of yourself."

"Heaven help you, if you take on my nature!" laughed Grace. "I do believe this sober old town would not suffer two such mad-caps as myself to infest it at once. Heigh-ho! I think I had better don the bridal veil and go into serious seclusion. Shall I marry an artist, a lawyer, or a gentleman, Mr. St. Cloud?"

"That depends upon your choice, for I doubt not you would make either happy," answered Julian, gallantly.

"I hold a good artist in high esteem, and adore art," laughed Grace. "And, *apropos*, I have not made you my promised visit yet, my friend; though I should have done so this very day, had I not met you here, for I want you and Villeta both to come to my house this evening."

"You must excuse me," said Villeta; "I am not prepared to go into company so soon after the death of my brother."

"Oh, no, dear sister, I shall not excuse you!" returned Grace. "Your remaining here will not bring your dear brother back to life, and feeding upon your sorrow can do you no good. And, moreover, I am only going to have a small company present, mostly to please my aunt, and I want a few select friends to

please myself. Now you will come, for my sake, will you not—eh! dear Villeta? I will send my carriage for you, and, with your permission, keep you all night, and restore you safe to-morrow—and, I promise you, you shall be just as secluded as you may desire.”

“Oh, if it will be any gratification to you, dear Grace, I will come,” answered Villeta.

“It will make me happy, sweet sister,” rejoined Grace. “By-the-by, Villeta, did you ever see Leon Dupree? He is a sort of cousin of yours, I am told, and his mother is one of the heirs of this Ackland property—the only one besides yourself in fact.”

“Will he be there?” asked Villeta, quickly, with flushed features, exchanging glances with Julian.

“I expect him, for aunty invited him this morning. She thinks him a paragon par excellence.”

“And what is your opinion of him, if I may make so bold?” inquired Julian, with interest.

“Now that is a very delicate question to ask a marriageable young lady,” laughed Grace.

“I crave your pardon!” said Julian, coloring.

“I will venture to say he quite astonished me this morning,” pursued Grace; “and I warn you, you have a dangerous rival in your profession, and must look sharp to your laurels.”

“Is he an artist then?” asked Julian, quietly.

“I did not know he was, till he astonished me, this morning, by showing me my own interesting face upon canvas, and assuring me he had painted it from memory. You shall see it—it is very beautiful: I mean the execution—not the executed.”

“Is it considered a good likeness of the original?” inquired Julian, carelessly.

"Very—too good to be beautiful," laughed Grace; "though, for all that, there is great beauty in the general design—I never saw anything like it."

"How does the design differ from portraits in general?" inquired Julian.

"Why, it is just the head and face," answered Grace, "and seems somehow to be surrounded by space. I do not know as you can catch the idea I wish to convey, because I do not know how to describe it; but come and see it, and tell me what you think of it."

"Thank you!" said Julian; "I shall be most happy to avail myself of your kind invitation to come and see it, at all events. It must be something like yours, Miss Linden," he added, again exchanging glances with Villeta.

"Why, have you anything done in a similar style?" inquired Grace.

"I have a picture in my possession," replied Villeta, "which is said to be a very good likeness of myself, and which was brought to me by a gentleman who said he had painted it from memory."

"Quite a coincidence!" laughed Grace. "Pray do me the favor to let me see it!"

"With pleasure," answered Villeta; and she arose and left the parlor.

"Mr. St. Cloud," observed Grace, "I pray you not to think me devoid of the common feelings of humanity, because I do not come here looking as if I had lost all my friends, and talking as if there were nothing but death, and grief, and tribulation in the world! Heaven knows we poor mortals have sorrows enough, and think of them often enough, without being kept

continually in a lachrymose state, by the lugubrious looks, and weeping eyes, and doleful groans of every being on the face of the earth who makes any pretension to the title of friend ! It is my opinion, that while we belong to this world we ought to make the best of it ; and whatever most promotes cheerfulness, and consequently happiness, I believe best carries out the design of our Maker, who cannot delight in misery, and who, had He wished us never to laugh, would have moulded our faces as stolid and immobile as the faces of so many waxen dolls—and, for that matter, might have used the same materials. Had I lived a couple of centuries ago, and been imprisoned among the long-faced Puritans who settled New England, I believe I should have set my wits to work and constructed a machine for tickling myself to death, that I might have laughed myself out of the world, and thus got out of my misery and showed my contempt of the dolefulites at one and the same time.”

Thus Grace rattled on, in a lively strain, till Villeta returned.

“The very fac-simile of my own,” said Grace, as she took the painting from the hand of Villeta ; “with the exception of the face, which is far more beautiful than I ever hope to be. Who painted this, Villeta ?”

“The gentleman who brought it to me, and who claimed to be the artist, gave his name as Warren.”

“Warren ! Oh, yes—the person who was with your brother when he was attacked ?”

“The same.”

“Where is he located ? I must call upon him.”

“I do not think he is a professional artist—he claimed to be an amateur.”

"Well," said Grace, examining the picture closely, "it is my opinion that both were designed and painted by one and the same artist—or else one is, with the exception of the likeness, a copy of the other. Did you ever hear Mr. Warren speak of Mr. Dupree?"

"I think, from a remark I once heard him make, that he knew something of the family," answered Villeta, again exchanging glances with Julian.

"I wonder," said Grace, "if Leon Dupree got Mr. Warren to paint the likeness he this morning presented to me as his own work? There is something about all this which strikes me as rather curious, and I am going to discover the truth if possible. When did you see Mr. Warren, Villeta?"

"Not since the death of my brother."

"Why, that is strange, is it not?"

"He called to see me the same evening—but Mrs. Leslie would not permit any one to see me then, and he went away offended."

"Apropos—I saw Mrs. Leslie, on my way here, and told her she must come to-night with you," pursued Grace; "but she begged to be excused, saying she was not in good health. She looked quite pale and sad, as if she were in trouble. Villeta, if you know anything I can do for her, as your friend, command me."

"You are very kind, dear sister," answered Villeta, with feeling.

"So is a tiger to whatever it loves," laughed Grace. "Serving you, dear Villeta, is pleasing myself—so do not give me more credit than I deserve. By-the-by, Mr. St. Cloud, do you not know something of this brother artist of yours—Mr. Warren?"

"I am inclined to think no such person exists," replied Julian.

"How so? what do you mean?" inquired Grace.

"I think from what you say, and for some other reasons which I do not care to mention, that the same artist painted the two pictures."

"Ha!" exclaimed Grace, with a sudden flash of her countenance, as if illumined with a new idea—"and Julian St. Cloud is the artist! eh?"

Villeta started, and looked at Julian for confirmation—for the suggestion struck her with the force of truth.

"Me?" replied Julian, coloring: "I am neither Mr. Warren, nor Dupree, though I think the twain one."

"Ha! I catch your meaning!" cried Grace: "you think this Warren was Dupree himself? Both pictures alike! both painted from memory! Yes, yes—I see it!" and she glanced meaningly at Villeta. "He changed his name for no good purpose, if indeed it was Dupree who came to you as Warren, dear sister."

"There was something about Mr. Warren I did not altogether fancy," replied Villeta; "but I know not that your suspicions are correct, dear Grace; he always treated me in a gentlemanly manner. I should like much to know if indeed he is Dupree."

"Come to-night and see Dupree, and then you will know for a certainty. By-the-by, why not come with me now?"

"No, I will wait till Mrs. Leslie returns."

"Well, I will send the carriage for you about dark," said Grace. "And, with your permission, I will take

this painting along with me. I will put the two together, and we will have the pleasure of showing them both to Dupree at the same time. It may help to solve the mystery, even should we be mistaken in our conjectures."

After some further conversation, Grace took leave of Villeta and Julian; and, soon after, Julian also took leave of Villeta. It was arranged that all should meet again in the evening at the De Vere Mansion. But did they all meet there? There was one guest wanting. Villeta Linden had suddenly and mysteriously disappeared.

CHAPTER XXVI.

A MYSTERIOUS LETTER.

It was quite dark when Mrs. Leslie returned to her dwelling. She had gone out for the purpose of selecting another residence, in a quiet and genteel part of the city, and, having rambled much further than she intended, did not get back as early by a couple of hours as she expected to have done on leaving home.

"Where is Miss Linden, Suza?" she asked of the colored domestic, as she entered the parlor.

"She say she was gwine out to visit Miss De Vere, who am gwine to gib a party dis night. She say you know somet'ing about it. De carriage it come and took her. And, oh yes, Missus, she lef' you dis note—de Lor' bress her!"

As Suza spoke, she took a three-cornered billet

from the mantle-piece and handed it to Mrs. Leslie, who opened it and read :

" *My Dear Friend*.:—Do not think unkindly of me for going out before your return. Sister Grace was here, and would have me come to spend the night with her ; she would take no denial ; and now she has sent her carriage for me even earlier than I expected. She said she had seen and invited you, but you wished to be excused, otherwise I would have waited for you. Till to-morrow, my dear friend, adieu !

" VILLETA."

" Ah ! God bless the dear, sweet girl !" murmured Mrs. Leslie, pressing the note to her lips. " How I love her ! how I love her ! the angel ! I believe, under God, she will be my salvation ; for in her innocent presence I feel my degradation, and sincerely repent me of my sins, and resolve to sin no more. When I first heard her name, I determined to save her from the snares of a villain ; and this, thank God ! was the turning point in my downward career ; for in saving her, I save one on the verge of the abyss, who in return can extend the helping hand to me, who am far down in the darkness, and need the aid of one above to draw me to the light."

While Mrs. Leslie stood musing, a carriage stopped before the door ; and, going to the window, she was addressed by a footman in livery, who, removing his hat, and making a low, respectful bow, said, with a peculiar English accent :

" We've called for Miss Linden, madam."

" Miss Linden !" echoed Mrs. Leslie, in surprise. " Is not this Miss De Vere's carriage ?"

"It is, madam."

"Why, you have already taken her away once—or somebody has. She has been gone—how long, Suza?"

"Mos' a hour, I's guess," answered Suza: "it wa'n't quite dark when she lef'."

"Did she go away in a carriage, Suza?"

"Oh, yes, missus—in a bery nice one too."

"This is strange!" said Mrs. Leslie, uneasily: "there is some mystery here. Are you sure she is not at the De Vere Mansion?" she inquired of the footman.

"I'm not sure, madam, for we left there nearly an hour ago, having to go to another place before coming here."

"Well, I think you will find her there on your return," said Mrs. Leslie; "she certainly left here to go there; probably some friend of Miss De Vere called for her; but if you do not find her when you get back, send me word immediately."

"We will, madam," replied the footman. And he added: "It wouldn't be anything strange to find Miss Grace had called for Miss Linden, and taken her away herself, just for a joke."

He bowed respectfully, put on his hat, and mounted to his place behind the carriage, which was immediately driven away. Mrs. Leslie stood a short time at the window, and mused, while a shade of uneasiness settled upon her now pale features.

"It is strange," she thought; "and I fear it is not all right. Can it be that Leon Dupree has had a hand in this? But no—even though not morally too good for any evil work, he certainly would not dare to commit the high-handed outrage of kidnapping one whose

disappearance would create a fearful excitement in the community. When Villeta was friendless and unknown, poor girl! this might have been done with a chance of impunity; but not now, thank God! not now—and this Leon Dupree knows as well as I. No, as the servant suggested, Grace has probably called and taken her away, or sent some one else for her, though I shall not feel altogether at ease till I hear. God shield the sweet angel from harm!"

While these thoughts were passing through the mind of Mrs. Leslie, she stood looking out of the window; and just as she was on the point of turning away, her eye fell upon a ragged little girl, who seemed to be shrinking from observation, and at the same time examining the different houses, as if to decide at which to make a call. By the light of a neighboring street lamp, Mrs. Leslie could see her quite distinctly; and her thin, haggard face, and tattered garments, led her to the natural conclusion that the poor girl had ventured forth from some miserable den to beg for food, and was really an object for commiseration. Whatever might have been the past sins and errors of Mrs. Leslie, she ever had, and still retained, a heart to sympathize with the woes and misfortunes of her fellow beings; and taking a silver coin from her pocket, she called the poor child to her.

"Here is a trifle for you, little girl," she said, as she handed her the coin from the window.

The poor thing took it, dropped a courtesy, and looked up with a kind of hesitating, frightened embarrassment.

"I was not much speak Engleesh," she said: "I was German. I was look to find Miss Villeta Linden."

"Ha! do you know her? what of her?" inquired Mrs. Leslie, with interest.

"I was not know she," was the answer; "but I was find to gif her this;" and she held up a letter.

"Come in—she lives here," said Mrs. Leslie, hastening to the door. "Give me the letter!"

The girl hesitated, and seemed to shrink back, clutching the missive tightly, and putting it behind her, as if she feared it might be taken from her. Mrs. Leslie's curiosity was much excited, and the girl's manner, combined with other circumstances, made her suspicious:

"Give me the letter!" she repeated, eagerly. "Who is it from? what is it about?"

"I was gif it Miss Linden, and it tells she."

"Well, give it to me—you need have no fear—it will be in proper hands."

"You was Miss Linden?" inquired the girl, in a hesitating manner.

The very inquiry proved that the girl did not know Villeta, and Mrs. Leslie felt strongly tempted to reply in the affirmative, fearing that if she answered in the negative, and stated the fact of Villeta's absence, the girl might go away without doing her errand; and this errand, she thought, might be connected with a plot against her peace and happiness. What was she to do? It was not right to tell a falsehood—and yet she had many times done worse with a less honest motive. She hesitated, pondered, and argued the matter with her own conscience. If there were villainy afoot, which she strongly suspected, was it not her duty to try and thwart it by any means in her power? would she not be justified in meeting treachery

with deception? We do not say she was right in conclusion—for we hold to the maxim, that truth should be at all times spoken—but we can aver, in extenuation, that her motive was good, and very few would have done otherwise under the circumstances.

"Give me the letter," she said—"I am the person you seek."

"I was gif it Miss Linden," hesitated the child; "I was gif it to no one but she."

"Well, I tell you I am the person to receive it," rejoined Mrs. Leslie.

She held out her hand, and the girl, with some reluctance, and evidently not altogether satisfied she was doing right, put the letter into it. Mrs. Leslie hurried to the light, leaving the ragged bearer of the missive standing on the steps at the door. The letter was superscribed to Villeta, in a rather good but nervous hand; was written on plain, ruled foolscap; was folded rather neatly; but was somewhat soiled, probably by the hands of the bearer; and was sealed by a single wafer, in such a manner that, by holding it open with the fingers, a few sentences could be deciphered. Had this letter come through the post, or in any manner not calculated to excite suspicion, we must do Mrs. Leslie the justice to say that she would not have ventured to look inside of it, even if unsealed; but now she examined it eagerly—twisted it, turned it, and held it in all possible positions to the light—and having at length made out one or two sentences, and parts of sentences, she no longer hesitated about the propriety of the act, but broke it open, with a kind of nervous haste, and read as follows:

"PHILADELPHIA, June 27th, 1836.

*To Miss Villeta Linden :—*Believe, Miss Linden, this comes from one who, though a stranger to you personally, knew your parents well, and was a personal friend of both. By an advertisement in the papers, I have learned that you are about to come into possession of a fortune, and Heaven knows it makes me glad to think you will once more be placed above the temptations of want. Will you permit me to appeal to your kind heart for a deed of charity to one who was once your father's friend? I am in a miserable quarter of this great city, friendless, sick, and destitute. I, who was once rich and prosperous, have been very unfortunate, as I will explain to you, if you will do me the favor to come back with the bearer of this epistle. I saw the funeral train of your brother pass, and learning whose it was, I made inquiries about you, and so discovered your residence; and I was intending to call on you some night after dark—for I hardly look fit to see you by daylight—when I was suddenly taken down with a very severe attack of inflammatory rheumatism, and now I fear I shall not recover. For the love of God, will you not come and see me, and bring me a little money, whatever you can spare? I have something I want to tell you, which much concerns you to know. You will probably recognize my name—you must have heard your dear father speak of me—for I was one of the parties who were present at the wedding of your parents, and the only one of three, besides the good minister, who signed the marriage certificate. If you have that certificate now in your possession, look at it, and you will see my name. And as I am the

only one of all that were then present who is still living—at least I think so—my evidence may be of use to you in this property affair, in case the original certificate is lost. But come to me at once! Follow the bearer, an honest little German girl, and have no fear, even though my residence is in a miserable locality. And will you be kind enough to come alone? I pledge you my sacred honor there is no danger, and you cannot but have confidence in your father's friend. But if you are afraid to venture alone with the poor little girl, you can take a companion till you get in sight of my abode, but no one must see me but yourself. Hoping this appeal of a dying friend will not be made in vain, I subscribe myself,

“Yours in misfortune and sorrow,

“HENRY ZECK.”

Mrs. Leslie read and re-read the letter, and then sat down and pondered. Had she done right in opening it? She could not think she had done any harm, and she felt certain that Villeta would forgive her when she should know her motive. But what was to be done now? that was the great question. Was the letter true or false? If true, how important was it that the writer should receive attention! and how important that his deposition concerning the marriage should be taken! If false, it was a dark scheme to entrap Villeta, and how important that it should be thwarted, and the vile authors of it exposed! Was it a scheme of Leon Dupree to get Villeta into his possession? It might be—he was capable of such a base act, if he could but keep himself behind the curtain. But what was Mrs. Leslie to do in the matter? Should

she act for Villeta? should she follow the girl and ascertain the truth? She felt tempted to do so. She called the girl into the parlor, and brought her to the light, and looked keenly and searchingly into her thin, pale, haggard, unwashed face—looked so long, and so steadily, that the poor child became frightened, and troubled, and anxious to get away.

"What is your name?" demanded Mrs. Leslie, somewhat sternly.

"Catharine," replied the child.

"Catharine what?"

"Catharine Frankstein."

"Where do you live?"

"I was lif Mr. Jacobs," replied the girl. And then quickly added, with some confusion: "Now I lif Mr. Zeck."

"Who is Mr. Zeck?"

"He was sick man," answered Catharine.

"Where is he?"

"You was come, I shows—I was not much speak Engleesh."

"Can you not tell me where he lives?"

"I was not much speak Engleesh—you was come, I shows," repeated the girl.

"Are you hungry?"

"Yes, I much hungry."

"Suza," said Mrs. Leslie, calling the servant, "take this child into the kitchen and give her as much as she can eat. I will go with you in a few minutes, Catharine. Go and eat while I get ready."

And as Suza led off the little girl, Mrs. Leslie hastily left the house, and, crossing the street, rung the bell of a genteel-looking dwelling.

"Is the Alderman at home?" she inquired of a girl who opened the door.

"He's just eating his supper, ma'am," was the reply.

"Tell him I wish to see him a few moments, on business that will admit of no delay," said Mrs. Leslie, in a quick, excited tone.

She was conducted into the office of the magistrate, which was on the first floor, in the front part of his dwelling; and scarcely was she seated, when the Alderman himself made his appearance. He recognised her, bowed, and Mrs. Leslie proceeded, in a flurried manner, to state her business.

"Excuse me for disturbing you," she said; "but I have come to ask your advice, and get your assistance, in a matter that may be of great importance."

"Proceed," replied the magistrate, blandly; "anything I can do for you shall be done with pleasure."

"Read that," said Mrs. Leslie, handing him the letter. And the moment he had finished the epistle, she continued: "The young lady to whom that letter is addressed, at present resides with me, but is now away. Suspecting something wrong, I ventured to open it; and since reading it, and questioning the bearer, my suspicions of some foul plot against my friend are strengthened; and I wish to personate her, and go with the bearer, and ascertain the truth; but I am afraid to go alone, or at least without help at hand, in case of necessity. Now cannot you get a couple of officers to go with me—or rather follow me, at such a distance as not to excite suspicion, so that I can have help at hand in case of need? I will pay them and you well for all your trouble, even though I may not require any assistance."

"Certainly," replied the magistrate, "it can be done as you wish; but they can also act without you, and save you all risk in the matter, by taking this girl in charge, and compelling her to lead them to the individual who wrote the letter, whom they can arrest on suspicion, if they find his statement incorrect."

"No," said Mrs. Leslie, "I would prefer to run this risk—for with the officers at hand I shall not be afraid—and if the letter contains a true statement, I would much rather the party who wrote it should not know he has been suspected. Can you get the officers here immediately, that I may speak with them and have a mutual understanding?"

"I will have them here in five minutes," said the Alderman, stepping out of his office.

He was even better than his word; for in less than the time named, he returned with two strong, stalwart men, to whom Mrs. Leslie hurriedly explained what she wanted; and having arranged with them a plan of action, with proper signals for communication, she hastened back to her dwelling.

The little girl was still eating voraciously, as if she had not tasted food before for a long season; and after waiting a reasonable time for her to finish, during which she ate some herself, Mrs. Leslie told her to take the remainder of her supper in her hand, as she was anxious to set out to visit the sick man, who, judging from the starved condition of his nurse, must be suffering indeed. Merely telling the servant that she was going out to visit a sick friend, and expected to be back in a couple of hours at the farthest, Mrs. Leslie set off with her strange guide, who, with her hands full of bread and meat, still continued her endeavors

to appease the cravings of a hunger bordering on starvation.

The parties hurried up to Fifth street, which they had scarcely reached when the carriage of Grace De Vere stopped at the door of Mrs. Leslie's dwelling, to announce the fact that Villeta Linden had not yet made her appearance at the De Vere Mansion ; but learning from the servant that Mrs. Leslie had gone out, she knew not where, and that Villeta had not returned, the carriage was again driven rapidly away, to communicate the startling intelligence to the anxious friends of the lovely orphan.

Meantime Mrs. Leslie, guided by Catharine, hastened down Fifth, till she came to a dark, narrow, filthy street, which led up into the vilest and most miserable locality of the great city ; and turning up this, she and her guide continued to press forward, through dark lanes and alleys, till at last they stopped before a low, dilapidated, wooden structure, which Catharine, in her broken English, announced as the place of her destination. At first Mrs. Leslie shrunk back at the thought of entering such a murderous-looking building ; but glancing timidly around, and perceiving at no great distance two dim figures, which she supposed to be the officers who had followed her, she summoned up courage, and said boldly to Catharine, so that she might be heard by them :

" This is the place, eh ? Well, lead the way ! "

Catharine quietly pushed back the old door, and entered a dimly-lighted apartment ; and the next moment, with another timid glance around her, Mrs. Leslie crossed the threshold, and the door closed behind her.

CHAPTER XXVII.

A MURDERER FOILED.

THE room in which Mrs. Leslie found herself, was small and unfurnished, and was lighted only by the feeble rays of a lamp which stood in an adjoining apartment, the door of which was open. Having closed the outer door behind her, Catharine led the way into the lighted apartment; and here Mrs. Leslie beheld, upon a bed of straw in one corner, a short, stout-looking man, some forty-five years of age, with black hair, bushy whiskers, and a coarse, villainous-looking face, which at the first glance impressed her very unfavorably. Was this man intellectual? had he ever known refinement? was he the author of the letter to Villeta? were questions which passed through the mind of Mrs. Leslie, and were instantly answered by herself in the negative.

On the approach of Mrs. Leslie, the man raised himself upon his elbow, apparently without effort or pain—which she thought rather surprising for one dying with inflammatory rheumatism—and fixed his black, snaky eyes almost fiercely upon her, surveying her deliberately from head to foot, and foot to head. She was alarmed—for she felt assured, from all she saw, that there was a dark scheme afoot—but she controlled her feelings so far as to appear externally calm, composed and indifferent.

“So,” said the man, with a savage growl, “you’re Miss Linden, are ye?”

"And you are?"

"Jack Guthrie, by ——!"

"Indeed!" said Mrs. Leslie, taking a step or two backward—"I have no business with any gentleman of that name. Catharine," she called to the girl, speaking very sternly and very positively, "I will retire—you have made a mistake."

"Belay there!" rejoined Jack: "why, shiver my timbers, if I don't think in this —— fog I've mistook the figure-head for the starn, and got the wrong name. Yes, by ——! You see, miss, we old sailors is apt to get foul whensomever we tries to make a clean run on land—and—and—Yes, you see, Jack Guthrie's the name I ships under, and when you hailed, in course, old sailor-like, I answered according to the papers. But Jack Guthrie's not my name—no, shiver my timbers if it is, miss—my name's Zeck, miss—Henry Zeck—that is, I mean, that's the name what I took from my mother."

"You are a very different person than I expected to find in Henry Zeck, the companion and bosom friend of my father," returned Mrs. Leslie, coldly.

"Why, yes, miss," replied Jack, sitting up on his straw, entirely forgetful of his painful disease, and twisting off a large cud of tobacco from a plug in his hand, and crowding it into his large, sensual mouth—"Why, yes, miss, that's true both ways, no doubt. You expected to see a —— silky, soft-haired puppy of a feller, and me a blooming maid of twenty, and we're both disapp'inted. I'm an old salt, and you're old enough not to be fetched to by false signals."

"I am certainly old enough to see through a scheme as shallow as yours," said Mrs. Leslie, indignantly;

"and I warn you to keep your distance and a civil tongue, while I ask, and you answer, a few civil questions."

"Well, come in, miss, and cast anchor on that stool—it ain't the best seat in the world, but it's the best aboard this craft."

"No," returned Mrs. Leslie, taking her position in the door between the two rooms, "I will remain here till I have asked my questions, and got your answers, and then, with your kind permission, I will retire. Catharine," she said to the girl, who had thrown herself down on the floor, indifferent to everything going on, and was already half asleep—"Catharine, I say, come here!" And as the girl roused herself up and obeyed, she added: "Go into the front room and open the outside door."

"What's that for?" growled Jack, with a savage scowl.

"So that I can retreat in safety, in case you make any attempt to injure me."

"Why, miss, you mistake me—I don't mean you no harm."

"So much the better—then I shall have no occasion to fly from you."

"But I don't want every——land-lubber about, to be peeping into my quarters," growled Jack.

"Close the door then, Catharine, but do not fasten it," said Mrs. Leslie to the girl, who in every respect silently obeyed her instructions, moving about as one who had no will or mind of her own. "Now then, sir," pursued Mrs. Leslie, fixing her eye upon Jack, who still kept his position in the straw, "pray tell me why you sent for Miss Linden to meet you here, in

this miserable quarter of the city, at this unseasonable hour?"

"Didn't the letter say?"

"That letter was simply a decoy, and was never written by you," rejoined Mrs. Leslie, sternly.

"How do you know it wasn't?" inquired Jack, sullenly.

"Because your language proclaims you a low, ignorant sailor, and one utterly incapable of putting together the sentences there written, even allowing that you can write at all, which I very much question. Now I wish to know the author of that letter, and for what base purpose it was written?"

"Why," said Jack, looking not a little perplexed, "the fact is, you see, I've shipped a sea, which has fetched me on to my beam ends, and so I got a feller shipmate to hoist a signal of distress, hoping for some sich craft as you to run along side and lend a hand."

"You are telling a deliberate falsehood, sir," said Mrs. Leslie, quietly.

"Well, — my eyes, if you've got any manners," growled Jack.

"Now mark me!" she pursued, in a tone of easy, bold assurance—"I know there is some villainous scheme at work, and I am determined to find out what it is. I suspected it before I came, and therefore came prepared for it. So far from entrapping me, or Miss Linden, as you intended, you are yourself entrapped, and are at my mercy. You look surprised, and also somewhat incredulous. But mark me! and I tell you this for your benefit: More than one policeman has followed me hither, and is now waiting just outside for my signal to rush in and arrest you."

"The d——l!" exclaimed Jack, turning pale.

"What I tell you is true," continued Mrs. Leslie; "and now, if you want to escape, your only chance is to make a full confession, and give up the author of this infamous plan—for it requires no adept to discover that you are only a miserable tool in the hands of another."

Jack looked steadily at the speaker for a few moments, and then his sharp, black eyes slowly wandered around the almost empty apartment. The lamp was standing on an old, dusty, worm-eaten mantle, and on this the eyes of Jack finally settled, and he looked steadily at it for perhaps a minute, during which time Mrs. Leslie watched him closely, waiting for his reply.

"What do you want?" he asked at length, at the same time rising slowly to his feet, and shaking off the straw as a spaniel does water.

"I want you to make a clean breast of this matter, and tell me the name of the villain who set you to work!"

"And if I don't?" said Jack, turning his back to Mrs. Leslie and affecting to yawn.

"Then I shall give you into the hands of the police."

"And if I do?"

"Then you shall escape."

Jack walked to the light, took it up, and then, facing round, advanced a step toward Mrs. Leslie.

"Stop!" she exclaimed; "you must not approach me, or I shall retire and give the alarm."

"See here," he rejoined, holding the light in front with one hand and the other behind him, "you think

you've got me foul—but it ain't so. If I wanted to harm you, I could put a ball through ye in a second; and then, by dashing out this light, I could, in the turn of a hand-spike, put myself where all h—I couldn't find me. So we're even—and now let's parley. You say you've got the police outside—I take your word for that; I've got a pistol in my hand, loaded and cocked, and I'm a ——— good shot—you can take my word for this; and so now s'pose we settle on sich articles as will suit us both. You're a brave old gal, and a cunning one—so I don't so much mind being caught afoul, if I can only carry out my plan, which, if you've a mind to lend a hand, I can, and have clear sailing."

"What is your plan?" inquired Mrs. Leslie, with secret uneasiness.

"Why, I want you to go and leave me, and take that little gal and them ——— land-sharks away with you."

"And in return will you tell me why I have been brought hither?"

"You was never wanted here," replied Jack, somewhat savagely; "for I've been overhauling my reckoning, and if you're Miss Linden, then, blast my eyes, if I know a Chinese junk from a Baltimore clipper."

"Well, no," said Mrs. Leslie, "I am not Miss Linden—but I am her friend, and stand between her and harm."

"Well, if you'll agree to set sail and take all your ——— crew with ye, and not trouble me no more, I'll tell you what I did expect to do."

"I will—I give you my solemn promise."

"Well, if you'd been the gal I wanted, and you'd come just as innocent as I wanted, without no suspicion, I should have cut your throat, and chucked you down a hole which I dug on purpose."

"Merciful God!" exclaimed Mrs. Leslie—"and why would you have done this?"

"For pay, in course."

"And who would have paid you?"

"Belay there!" said Jack—"I'm not going to tell you everything."

"Ha!" exclaimed Mrs. Leslie, as she recalled the contents of the letter, (which showed familiarity on the part of the writer with the history of Villeta,) and remembered who would be benefitted by the death of the lovely orphan—"it needs no great penetration to discover that the author of this murderous scheme is a Dupree—father, or son, or both—am I right?"

"Guessing with you is a science," grinned Jack, "but it'll never do for a salt to blow his gaff afore he gets his pay."

"Well, what shall I pay you to tell me?"

"I didn't mean that," answered Jack, "for I'm going to get my pay from the skipper, just as if I'd finished the whole cruise. A — good round lie and some cat's blood 'll do the business, and that's better'n murder anyhow—aint it?"

"I do not understand you," replied Mrs. Leslie, fairly shuddering at the cold-blooded manner in which the ruffian talked of murder.

"Why, ye see, old gal, not knowing if I'd fetch to the trim little craft by my signals, and not liking to be cheated out of my honest due, I killed a cat, and have got her here; and I can stain myself with her

blood, you see, and go and report that I did the job beautiful, and so get my pay. All I want is, that you'll let me have plenty of sea-room till I get aboard my freight, and then if I can get hull down to your — land-sharks arter that, it's all I ax. Come, will you do it? Yes or no?"

"If you will tell me the name of the person employing you, I will."

"No, blast my eyes—can't do that."

"And this girl," said Mrs. Leslie, looking around—"do you wish me to take her with me?"

"Yes, and keep her close."

"Is it possible that one so young can be sufficiently hardened to assist you in murdering an innocent being?" inquired Mrs. Leslie.

"Oh, she's a little half-starved fool!" returned Jack, contemptuously; "and whatsoever the old Jew says, she has to do. As to helping me, she did her part in taking the letter and fetching some one back with her; and if you'd been Miss Linden, and I'd killed you, I'd have chucked her down the same hole for company."

"And so the old Jew gave her her instructions?" said Mrs. Leslie, carelessly, hoping thus to draw Jack on to speak more definitely of the author or authors of a scheme of which he was but a vile tool.

"Avast there," returned Jack, "whilst I clap a stopper on this — tongue of mine! Now, see here — be you going to give me a wide berth or not? If so, take yourself off at once—for if you stay here another minute, — my old timbers, if I don't make another skylight in your foretop."

As he spoke, he brought his pistol round in front

of him, and leveled it at the head of Mrs. Leslie, who, exclaiming, "For God's sake, do not kill me!" hurried out of the house, followed by Catharine.

As the two turned down the dark, narrow street, in haste and alarm, they were accosted by the officers who had been on the watch, and Mrs. Leslie communicated to them all that had taken place in the temporary habitation of Jack Guthrie. The girl was next questioned closely, and was made to tell all she knew of the dark, mysterious affair, her remarks tending to criminate the old Jew, who had forced her by murderous threats to act the part she had carried through. A consultation resulted in the decision that Mrs. Leslie should return home and take the girl with her, and keep a strict watch upon her, while the officers should repair to old Jacobs' establishment, and there lie in wait for Jack Guthrie, who, it was thought, would be likely to visit there to get his pay, and whom, if they found, they were resolved to take into custody on suspicion.

Meantime, let us return to the hardened ruffian, and see what became of him.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

MURDER.

No sooner had Mrs. Leslie and the girl left the house, than the old sailor hastened to bolt the front door, preparatory to carrying out a by-scheme of his own.

The truth was, Jack had never had any particular desire to murder Villeta ; and, so he could gain his own ends in any other way, he felt no disposition to commit a crime that would perhaps be found out sooner or later, and thus increase his chances of ending his life on the gallows. He had been set to the bloody undertaking by Dupree and the Jew, and had been promised the sum of ten thousand dollars as soon as the job should be done, and with this money he had resolved to leave the country, never to return.

Dupree in fact had planned the whole matter, and had even written the letter to Villeta in a disguised hand, taking his cue from one of the names subscribed to the marriage certificate ; and the Jew, by terrible threats, had compelled the girl Catharine to be the pretended nurse and messenger, instructing her well in everything she was to say and do, but concealing from her the guilty purpose. The whole plan was neither more nor less than to get Villeta to return with her to the pretended abode of her father's friend, (and had she received the letter, instead of Mrs. Leslie, it is more than likely she would have followed the bearer without question, being too pure and innocent herself to suspect others,) and then Jack was to watch his opportunity in that lonely house, kill both Villeta and Catharine, and bury them in a hole under the hearthstone, which he had even dug for the purpose ; and this done, who would know aught of the transaction but the guilty parties ? More difficult plots than this, and plots equally murderous, had been successfully carried out by the guilty authors, and therefore all felt sanguine of success.

But to be prepared against a failure that might

give his employers sufficient reason for refusing to pay him the stipulated sum, Jack had also planned, in case Villeta did not return with Catharine, to murder the poor girl, stain himself with her blood, and swear he had killed them both—or, failing even of this, to stain himself with the blood of a cat, which he had during the day decoyed into his den and killed for the purpose. His interview with Mrs. Leslie, and the discovery that she was not the person wanted, combined with the fact of her suspicion, and the announcement that she had brought with her the officers of police, readily induced him to fall back upon his *dernier* resort; and this made him anxious to get rid of her, and careless about revealing what he did, well knowing she would get no chance of communicating with the parties in whom he was most interested; and should her statement be true, and should she even inform the police on retiring from the building, he thought he could elude them, and fancied, at the worst, he could only be arrested on suspicion, and must speedily be released, because nothing criminal could be proved against him. At all events, under the circumstances, he thought this plan the best, and safest, and acted accordingly.

Therefore, as stated, no sooner had Mrs. Leslie and the girl left the old building, which had been temporarily taken for the object shown and the rent paid in advance, than Jack hastened to bolt and secure the door; and then putting his ear against it, he listened for some time for any sound without that might indicate the approach of any other party to force an entrance. Jack was a brutal, bloody ruffian, but was not a deep or cunning villain, else would he never have so

boldly avowed his design, and thus given others a cue for action in a quarter he did not suspect. He thought if there were officers without, and if they should think proper to act in the matter at all, they would at once attempt to force an entrance and not remain on the watch; and for this he was prepared, believing he could escape another way; and as no one came to the door, and as Mrs. Leslie had promised to leave him in peace, in consideration of his making known his design, he very soon came to the conclusion that he was safe from scrutiny and molestation, and consequently proceeded with his design as coolly and carelessly as if nothing had happened to give him uneasiness.

Going into the other room, he took up the carcass of a cat which lay in one corner, cut its throat with a knife, and smeared his hands and arms, and sprinkled some of the blood upon his face and clothes. This done, he looked to his pistols, put them and his knife under his waistcoat, blew out his lamp, and sallied out of the back door, into a dark, filthy alley, which he followed to its termination, and thence made his way down to Fifth street, and to the rear door of the pawnbroker's establishment.

Although the hour was yet early, the Jew, for important reasons, had closed his store for the night; but he was within, however, and the signal of Jack was quickly answered; and he was conducted, by old Jacobs, into the same small, miserable apartment where we have been on previous occasions; and where, as Jack expected, he found Basil Dupree, who had promised to be here, with a large sum of money, to reward him for his bloody work.

"Well," said Jack, "if I haven't done the job as

clean as the best butcher in town, I hope my next cargo may sink to Davy Jones' Locker."

"Did the plan succeed? is the girl dead?" inquired Dupree, eagerly, in a guarded whisper.

"Yes," said Jack, throwing himself upon a seat, in a careless attitude, "she's dead. She swallowed the bait, and got harpooned, too, by —!"

"Any one can see there has been blood let," returned Dupree, with a cold, sardonic smile. "Why, Jack, you did not make a *clean* job of it, as you say — look at your hands and clothes!"

"By —!" rejoined Jack, looking down at himself, "I do believe I got spattered; but, hang me, how could I help it? There was two of them, you know, and I had to make quick work on't. Besides, if I don't think there was some land-sharks about, I hope I may be scuttled."

"Oh, mine Got! vash you kills der poor Cherman gal, mine Catharine, as vash do all mine vorks?" whined the Jew. "Oh! oh! Misther Guthrie, you vash not kills her?"

"In course, you greasy old land-lubber!" replied Jack, appearing to get angry; "wasn't she down in the articles?"

"Oh, I vash not takes den dousand dollarsh for mine Catharine!" rejoined old Jacobs, pretending to be greatly troubled.

"Silence, you old fool!" sneered Dupree; "you know our plan was to have her put out of the way at the same time."

"Oh, no! oh, no! I vash not dink dat—so helps me!" again whined Isaac.

"You lie!" said Dupree; "you know you wanted

her killed—how else could we avoid detection? You only say this to have some excuse for not paying honest Jack here your share of the money."

"By ——!" rejoined Jack—"you can't sheer off that way, old death's head! for if you don't come up to the square, I'll put a chunk of lead under your hatches."

"You shall have your pay, honest Jack, never fear," said Dupree—"for I will myself settle with you, and take it out of this old miser afterward."

"Thank you, Cap.—that's the tune I likes to hear my friends pipe—and you know I was promised it to-night, just as soon as I'd finished the job."

"And you shall have it to-night, Jack, for I always make it a point to pay promptly the man who serves me well. But tell me—how did you manage it? did you allow the girl to suspect, and get alarmed, and call for help?"

"Not a —— bit of it," replied the ruffian. "You see, I had my berth in the straw, according to orders, and was dreadful low when she came; and arter begging for a little money, which she gin at once, I sent the little gal to buy me something to eat; and while she was gone, I got t'other one to feel my pulse; and while she was feeling, I ran my knife right into her heart, afore she knowed it, and chucked her right down the hole; and when the little one came back, I sarved her the same way."

"You are sure both are dead?" said Dupree.

"I hope I may never take another cruise if they ain't, and be —— to 'em!" answered Jack.

"Oh, mine Got!" exclaimed the Jew, in pretended horror—"vat a queer worlde! Nopody vash knows ven anypody ish safes—so helps me!"

"Well, Jack," said Dupree, "you have done it bravely, and shall have your pay; and it is my advice that you leave this city at once, and the country as soon as possible."

"I'll up anchor and set sail this very night," said Jack, secretly exulting at the success of his stratagem. "Heave ahead, Cap., so's I can be ready to catch the first breeze."

"We must take a parting drink first, Jack, and at old Jacobs' expense."

"Oh, I vash haf noting more strong ash vater all mine lifes," put in the Jew, who was playing a part, and came in at his cue.

"You lie," returned Dupree, "and you know it! Did you ever see such a stingy old miser, Jack? Why he has, to my certain knowledge, a cask of brandy in his cellar, which is at least fifty years old, and yet he would rather have his blood drawn than that. Come, never mind his grumbling, but let us go down and tap it, and drink his health."

"That's the talk, Cap.," said Jack.

The pawnbroker, still acting out his part, pretended to be much alarmed, and declared there was not a drop of liquor in his house, and that the cask in question contained only vinegar, and very poor stuff at that. Dupree only sneered at the Jew; and procuring a tumbler and gimlet, which he appeared to discover by accident, in different parts of the room, he took up the light, and said:

"Come, Jack, don't let us mind the old fool—I will soon prove him a liar, by giving you a taste of the best brandy you ever drank in your life."

"I'm one of them as was al'ays on hand at grog time," replied Jack.

Dupree passed into the entry, and thence down a flight of steep, narrow stairs, into a cold, damp, dismal cellar, and was followed by the old sailor, the Jew remaining above, grumbling and cursing. From the main cellar, a narrow passage led into a vault, some five feet by ten; and in this, half buried under old rubbish, was an old, mouldy-looking cask, which Dupree pointed out to Jack, saying:

"See how the old fool has covered it up, as if he were afraid of it himself. There is brandy, Jack, fifty years old—for the old miser told me so one day in confidence, little thinking that I was at the same moment resolving to drink his health with it. Is there a tap to it, Jack?"

"No, it's broke off," answered Jack, clearing away the rubbish, and running his hand over the head.

"Well, here, you hold the light, and I will soon make a hole in it," said Dupree. And then, as if with a second thought, he added: "Never mind, here is the gimlet, I will let you bore it, while I make a plug for it, for it is too precious to waste, and the loss of it would be the death of Isaac."

Jack took the gimlet, and stooped down to bore the hole; and placing the light beside him, Dupree stepped back a few paces, and pretended to look for a piece of soft wood among the rubbish. While doing this, he quietly laid his hand upon a heavy iron bar, and, watching his opportunity, he raised it suddenly, with both hands, and brought it down upon the head of Jack with all his might. It struck with a dull sound, crushing in the skull of the old sailor, and forcing out blood and brains. No groan, not even a gasp, followed the blow; but there was a slight quiver of some of the

muscles, and a spasmodic contraction of others, as the unfortunate man fell backward, face upward—*dead!*

“So,” muttered Dupree, as he gazed upon his bloody work, “that job is done, and well done—no more fear of Jack Guthrie. Would that all my enemies lay where he does! Would that old Isaac were sleeping soundly his last sleep! If I dared, I would put him here to-night; but it is necessary he should live on for the present, for another tenant might discover this body, and a faint suspicion has ere now been known to result in the detection of the author of a crime. Well, the girl is dead, and the property must come to my wife. It cannot come too soon, for I am deeply involved, and, but for this, must certainly have gone by the board. Now then to conceal this deed and go home.”

He stooped down and felt the pulse of his victim; and finding him to be dead, he next rifled his pockets, and secured everything of value—getting, among other things of little account, quite a clever sum of money, which Jack had, but a few days before, extorted from the old pawnbroker. He then took hold of an arm, and dragged the body forward to a deep hole, which had been previously prepared and concealed under the rubbish; and into this he tumbled the corpse, and proceeded to cover it with loose earth, which he stamped down with his feet; heaping some old boards, sticks, and broken furniture over all; and displaying, throughout the whole proceeding, the same cool indifference that he would have done in the burial of a dog.

Having thus removed all trace of his crime, Dupree took up the light, and hastened up the stairs, shutting the door behind him. He found the Jew sitting in the dark, trembling with apprehension; and with a sneer, as he set down the lamp, he said:

"Isaac Jacobs, you are the most cowardly scoundrel unhung."

"Ish Bloody Jack dead?" inquired the Jew, in a tremulous whisper.

"Dead and buried, and be —— to him!"

"Oh, I ish so mush glad ash never vash!" returned the pawnbroker; "now he vills not tells noting; and he vash gets no more monish, curse him! I vash prays all der times, dat you vills kills him mit der bar, vile he vash gets der prandy—che! che! che! Now den you vash owes me seventy-five dousand dollarsh?"

"For what, you old fool?"

"For gets der Linden gal co dead—dat vash vat you vash promish."

"Umph!" sneered Dupree—"we will talk about that another time. We will see if she is dead first, and then calculate in what degree her death was owing to you, and pay you accordingly."

"Oh, mine Got in Himmel! put dat vash fair par-gains!" said Isaac, anxiously.

"Silence, you old extortioner! I am not in a mood to talk now. Come, let me out—I am going home."

"Put you vill purns der paper dat vash hangs us mit a rope?"

"Yes, when I learn that the girl is dead—not before."

"Put Jack vash kills her."

"So he said, and I believe he told the truth, but I must be sure; and if she be not dead, I warn you that you will have to take her case in hand yourself. Come, light me out—I am not in a mood to talk now—for having tasted blood, I feel a very strong desire to cut your throat."

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“ Oh, holy Fader Apraham ! I vills lets you out so quick ash never vash ! ” cried the Jew, in alarm ; and he started up and hastened to the door, which he unlocked and opened with trembling hands. “ Cood night ! ” he said, as Dupree passed out without speaking. And he added to himself, as he closed and re-fastened the door : “ I vish I vash haf his monish, and der tuyvel vash haf himself.”

“ I will soon make an end of him ! and then, and not till then, shall I be safe ! ” thought Dupree, as he hurried from the narrow, filthy yard of the Jew, into Fifth street.

But just as these thoughts passed through his mind, two stout men sprang suddenly upon him, one on either side ; and a voice, that made his heart quiver, sounded harshly in his ear :

“ Make no resistance—you are our prisoner ! ”

CHAPTER XXIX.

A VILLAIN UNMASKED.

THE De Vere Mansion was a large, double, three-story, brick dwelling, fronting upon Chestnut street, was entered by a long flight of stone steps, and had a double area in front, enclosed by iron railings. Double doors opened into a large hall, which ran directly through the centre of the building, with broad, winding stairs leading up to the stories above. On the left of this hall was a spacious and elegantly furnished drawing-room ; and on the right a small, private parlor,

sitting-room, dining-room, and so forth; and in the rear of the mansion was a large, beautiful garden, with its shade-trees, fruit trees, gravelled and labyrinthine walks, and parterres of flowers, and vine-draped bowers.

The mansion was substantially and commodiously built by Colonel De Vere, a Southern planter, for his Northern summer residence; but after the death of his wife, the mother of Grace, he sold his plantation and took up his abode here with his daughter, till called away by death. After his funeral, the house was shut up for several months; during which time Grace, as mentioned in a previous chapter, made her home in the family of her guardian and adopted father, Amos Vincent; but returned to the mansion in the manner mentioned, refurnished it in a more modern and far more elegant style, and, with her maiden aunt, had resided here ever since, luxuriating in every enjoyment which desire could crave within the limits of wealth to satisfy.

In the large and sumptuously furnished drawing-room, on the night of Mrs. Leslie's singular adventure, and at the very moment when she stood face to face with Jack Guthrie in his miserable quarters, a number of persons of both sexes were assembled.

Of this number, most of whom had come hither at the instance of Miss Pierson, the aunt of Grace so frequently alluded to—a slim, prim, genteel-looking lady of forty-five—it suits our purpose to mention only those directly connected with our story. Conspicuous among all was Leon Dupree, with his lordly but condescending air, his cool and easy assurance, and his studious and fashionable attire. We mention him first, not

because he stands first in our estimation, but because he has held, and still holds, a prominent, though not enviable, position in our story. Then there was Julian St. Cloud, with his pale, intellectual, face, dreamy eyes, classical head, and poetical dress and air, in striking contrast with the honest, sincere, and no less intellectual, but awkward, homely, and abashed Herbert Raymond. And there, too, was little Mark Wellsford, a kind of human puppet—dapper, neat and trim—but distinguishable for nothing except for belonging to one of the first families, his foolish dissipation, and the high opinion he entertained of his own importance and honor. And Paul Mortvie was there—not as a guest, not as a member of the family, not as a domestic or attendant, but as something of all these combined. He was neatly dressed in a suit of black, with a broad, white collar turned down at the neck, which beautifully set off his dark skin and darker eyes; and as he sat apart from all the rest, glancing furtively over the assembled company, and listening without seeming to do so, his dark eyes occasionally shone with a strange lustre, as something spoken stirred the fires of his passionate soul. And last in our mention, but among the first in our regard, Grace herself was there—proud, brilliant, regal, queen-like—more thoughtful and less talkative than usual—but pleasant, and affable, and full of the kindly graces of a noble heart.

The moment chosen to introduce the company to the reader, was a few minutes prior to the return of the carriage of Grace, for the second time, with the startling news that Mrs. Leslie was from home and Villeta not to be found.

"Really, Miss Pierson, you do positively grow younger every day," said Leon, in a low, confidential tone, as for the second time that evening he paid his compliments to the aunt of Grace. "Upon my word, you have but one rival in all the beauty here assembled—the brilliant and witty niece of a no less brilliant and witty aunt."

"Ah! Leon, you know how to flatter," returned Miss Pierson, with a look that plainly said she thought he knew how to tell the truth in a very pleasing way. "And praise from so excellent an artist really makes me vain."

"Now it is my turn to blush," smiled Leon; "for to be called an excellent artist, by so good a judge, gives me a glimpse of fame."

"And to think," rejoined Miss Pierson, "you should have reached such a point of perfection, and not been suspected by even your most intimate friends! Really, I am quite astonished! You must have studied and worked while we poor common mortals were fast asleep."

"You know I have occasionally been absent from the city, Miss Pierson!" said Leon, with a meaning smile.

"Ah! I take!" returned the other, quickly: "you were not absent at all, but shut up in your studio! Indeed, sir, you deserve great credit."

"What does Miss Grace think of the picture?" inquired Leon, carelessly.

"Oh, she is delighted with it, has given it a post of honor in her gallery, and has been more than once to look at it, I assure you."

"She may like the picture," pursued Leon, glancing

over to where Grace stood conversing with Mark Wellsford, "but, deuce take it, if I think she cares anything for me."

"Oh, you do not know that," replied the aunt, in an encouraging tone. "Grace is a strange girl, and it is difficult to determine, from her manner, who she really does like—she has such an off-hand way with all."

"It is thought by some that she is engaged to Mark Wellsford," said Leon; "but, for my part, I think that gawky lawyer has much the best chance of winning her, if he only had sense enough to know it."

"*He?*" returned the aunt, with a shrug of contempt; "*he* win Grace? I should like to catch him trying such an experiment—the attempt would surely settle his visits here. No, no—he is only invited and tolerated out of respect to the guardian of Grace, who, Heaven only knows why, has formed a very high opinion of him. For myself, I think him a coarse, awkward clown, more fit to grace the kitchen of a farm house than the drawing-room of a mansion like this."

"It is very pleasant to observe how persons of cultivated tastes agree in matters of taste," smiled Leon. "Now I might have studied for an hour, without being able to express my opinion of that *soi-disant* lawyer so correctly as you have done in a few words. Ha! ha! the farmer's kitchen for him, by all means. See, my dear Miss Pierson, how he stares at that young lady next to him! and how he blushes and wriggles when she looks toward him! and how uncertain he is what to do with his huge hands and huger feet!"

"I declare," laughed Miss Pierson—who, we re-

gret to say, delighted in private, *innocent scandal*—
“your wit destroys my dignity, Leon. Forbear, my dear friend, or I shall be forced to laugh in a most unbecoming manner.”

“The *subject* of our conversation is enough to make one laugh, without the aid of a single observation,” rejoined Leon. “By-the-by, who is that young lady next to our kitchen lawyer?”

“That is Miss Warden, a lady from the South, said to be very wealthy,” answered Miss Pierson. “If you fancy her, let me present you.”

“No, Heaven save the mark!” returned Leon, “she is too old for me.”

“Why, she passes for twenty.”

“Indeed! then you, my dear Miss Pierson, should pass for sixteen.”

“Why, do you really think, friend Leon, she looks older than myself?”

“Much older, Miss Pierson, much older; though, for that matter, so do all the young ladies here: you have a very youthful appearance, I assure you.”

“Oh, you flatterer!”

“Rather say, oh, you truth-teller! By-the-by, Miss Pierson, I intend to surprise you some day, ere long.”

“In what way?”

“There, now, I have exposed my secret—I can keep nothing from you,” replied Leon, affecting to be a little embarrassed. “The truth is, I had your portrait under way before I thought of Grace; but I feared, if I presented yours first, I should make Grace jealous. You understand?”

Miss Pierson smiled, and signified, by a motion of her head, that she understood and appreciated the compliment.

"Do not mention this to Grace," he pursued, "for I am not altogether safe in that quarter, and would not like to irritate her."

"You shall be safe in that quarter, if I have any influence with the giddy girl," replied the aunt.

"A good word from you will do wonders," rejoined Leon.

"And you shall have it—never fear. I have spoken to Grace more than once concerning you, and I shall take pleasure in further advancing your suit."

"Thank you, my dear friend—you are very kind," smiled the artful villain.

"By-the-by, I am told a very pretty cousin of yours is expected this evening. It is said she is one of the heirs of the Ackland property, which has created so much talk in the fashionable world. I trust you will not fall in love with her at first sight."

"Yes," said Leon, slightly changing color, "I have heard that a kind of cousin of mine has been discovered by some interested parties, who are striving to make her a legitimate heir with my mother; but even should they succeed, I do not know as I shall feel specially honored by the acquaintance of the daughter of a bank-robber, even though a beauty and a relative. One may be unfortunately related, Miss Pierson—but there is, thank Heaven, no law to force one to associate with those who have disgraced themselves, or been disgraced through their antecedents. I was quite astonished, and not at all pleased, I assure you, when, a few days since, I heard of this girl and her singular claim, though I am even now inclined to think her an impostor."

"You must not say so to Grace," returned the aunt;

"for she is all bound up in the girl, and thinks there never was such another creature made."

"More is the pity," rejoined Leon, with something like a sneer. "Did you say she was expected here to-night?"

"Yes, and I am surprised that she has not arrived. Probably she intends to stay late, in order to create a sensation when she does appear. I have not seen her, but I know I shall not like her."

"I suppose, meeting her here, we shall be obliged to notice her, out of respect to Miss Grace?" said Leon.

"But we need not be familiar, and we can let her see her company is not suited to our caste," suggested Miss Pierson, with a slight toss of her head. "Grace will do as she likes, of course—but she knows very well that I claim the same privilege, and on this occasion I shall use it."

"See," said Leon, "they are having a consultation yonder! Miss Grace is collecting quite a party around her. And there, now, she beckons up that Byronic artist and the kitchen lawyer! I wonder what it can all be about! Were I in less agreeable company, I should be tempted to go and see."

"Probably she is asking them their opinion of the weather," said Miss Pierson, laughing: "she often makes very serious matters out of trifles, when she has weak-headed guests to entertain."

The cause of the excitement we will explain by saying, that one of her servants had just brought Grace the startling information, that the second attempt to find Villeta had proved a failure.

Leon and Miss Pierson continued to chat, and talk

little scandal, passing from one thing to another, and sparing no one who came under their special notice. Leon was really anxious to get away and learn the cause of the excitement—for he could see that Grace, Julian, Herbert, and one or two of the ladies, were much excited on some matter which might possibly concern himself—and more than once he detected furtive glances cast toward him—but he dissembled and played the hypocrite to perfection, pretending to think more of Miss Pierson than of all the others, well knowing how much it was to his interest to have a friend at court. At length the anxious circle separated; and soon after one of the ladies was conducted to a large, elegant piano, and played and sung several pieces in a most charming style. Leon took advantage of the first plausible opportunity, to quit the side of his dear friend, Miss Pierson; and approaching Mark Wellsford, he said:

“Miss Grace seems unusually serious this evening—do you know the cause?”

“Perhaps I do,” answered Mark, with studied coldness.

“Well, what is it?”

“Suppose I should say it is a secret?”

“Then you would say in effect that you know nothing about it,” replied Leon, in a sneering tone, as he somewhat insultingly took the dimensions of Mark with his eye; “for if it be a secret, I am certain Miss Grace has better sense than to confide it to you.”

“Do you intend to insult me, sir?” demanded Mark, with a crimson flush.

“As you please,” answered Leon, coolly. “I know no reason why I should spare one who seems desirous of breaking off from a long and intimate friendship.”

"A friendship which I am now satisfied reflects no credit upon one in *my* position," returned Mark, sharply.

"Sir," said Leon, in a low, measured tone, "I know not what you may have heard to cause you to change your opinion of me—but I most humbly beg leave to assure you, that I consider you a human weather-vane, turning face about at the first ill wind—and, moreover, I would add, for fear of being misunderstood by one who has more money than brains, that I also consider you an insolent puppy, whom it may become my unpleasant duty to chastise."

Mark turned pale, and his lip quivered, as he angrily replied :

"I have cause, sir, and good cause, for thinking you a villain ; and though I admit that you are physically *my superior*, I am not prepared to admit that in any thing else you are *my equal*."

"You are a fool !" retorted Leon—"a contemptible little fool ! and sooner or later I will have satisfaction for your insolence. You are safe here, for the presence of ladies protects you ; but we shall meet again, and then will come the hour of reckoning."

"Whenever you want such satisfaction as a *gentleman* may accord, you shall have it," rejoined Mark, as he turned on his heel and walked away, with a proud and insolent air.

This colloquial quarrel was carried on apart from the company, and was overheard by none save the boy Paul, who happened to be in close proximity, and who, without seeming to see or hear, watched the parties furtively, and listened attentively, losing not a word. Leon concealed his anger, and looked quietly after Mark, muttering to himself :

"Poor fool! he has been tampered with by a secret enemy of mine—for he is too much wanting in wit to have spoken thus without having been set on like a puppy by a new master."

He turned and walked toward Grace, who was conversing with one of the ladies—but whether by design or accident, she at the same instant left her companion and crossed over to her aunt on the opposite side of the room; and with a smile on his lips, but a curse in his heart, Leon altered his course, and approaching Julian, said, blandly :

"How thrives your suit with my fair cousin, whom I hoped ere this to have had the pleasure of seeing?"

"Do you mean Miss Linden?" returned Julian, coldly, and with an air of sternness, as he fixed his eyes keenly and searchingly upon the inquirer.

"I mean no other, provided *Linden* is her name," answered Leon, with a covert sneer, for he saw there was something wrong in this quarter also, and resolved to meet it as one upon his guard.

"You never knew her by any other name, did you?" said Julian, quietly.

"For that matter, I never knew her at all," replied Leon, with unblushing boldness.

"Well, who told you I was her suitor?" asked Julian, keeping his eye steadily upon the young villain.

"It matters not who told me, Mr. St. Cloud."

"And I presume, sir, it matters not how my suit thrives," was the cool reply.

"I think, Mr. St. Cloud," said Leon, sneeringly, "you have lost your manners."

"And I think, Mr. Dupree, you are not the fortunate finder," rejoined the artist.

What might have ensued, had the conversation between the two not been interrupted, we will not pretend to say—but just at this moment the voice of Grace attracted the attention of all.

“Ladies and gentlemen,” she said, “will you have the kindness to follow me?—I have something I wish to submit to your taste and judgment.”

And as she spoke, she led the way from the drawing-room into the hall, and up the stairs, and into a large, fine picture-gallery on the second story, whither she was followed by the whole company, not excepting the boy Paul, who entered last and still kept himself apart from all the others.

“Now,” said Grace, stopping before the likeness of herself—which, in a heavy gilt frame, occupied a conspicuous position in a gallery devoted to the finest works of art—“I want you all to tell me what you think of this picture.”

“Beautiful!” cried several voices.

“An excellent likeness!” said several others.

“It may be an excellent likeness,” said Grace, “and a beautiful painting—but I wish you all to observe that it is not the likeness which makes it beautiful, but the manner in which it is executed.”

“It is evidently the work of an artist of genius,” responded Mark Wellsford, examining it closely.

“Do tell us the name of the artist!” said two or three of the ladies.

“I present him to you in the person of Leon Dupree,” rejoined Grace, turning to the individual named, who was standing a little apart from the rest, and who crimsoned to the temples as he saw himself the cynosure of all eyes, not excepting those of Julian St. Cloud.

"Miss De Vere," he said, in some confusion, "I did not think you would expose my secret in this public manner."

"Genius such as yours, is too brilliant a light to be hid under a bushel," replied Grace.

Mark Wellsford looked at Leon with an air of surprise, and three of the ladies at once stepped forward to congratulate the amateur artist, assuring him that the painting was really beautiful, and that he had reason to be proud of his achievement:

"I am proud of it as the work of a friend whom I esteem," said Miss Pierson, boldly, approaching Leon and offering her hand, which he took with that air of embarrassment which passed for genuine modesty with the majority of those present. "And only consider, my friends," she continued, "that he painted the likeness from memory, and surprised Grace and myself by presenting it this morning! and we not to know, up to that moment, that he ever touched the pencil—it is really quite astonishing!"

"Quite astonishing indeed!" echoed several.

"Such a beautiful design!" said one.

"So beautifully executed!" said another.

"And such a capital likeness!" put in a third.

"Observe, all of you, that painting which hangs beside it!" said Grace, calling attention to a picture which was draped with black crape and concealed from view: "What do you think of that?"

"We cannot see it—what is it?" was the immediate reply and inquiry.

"Paul, uncover it," said Grace.

The boy placed under the picture an elegant portable stair-case, mounted it nimbly, removed the black

drapery, and thus exposed the beautiful likeness of Villeta Linden. Leon started as he saw it, turned pale, and, in spite of himself, became not a little agitated; while one exclaimed, "Oh, how beautiful!" and another, "So like the other!" and a third, "It must be by the same artist!" and all turned again, some with admiration, some with surprise, and some with curiosity, to look at Leon, who just at the moment wished himself a hundred leagues away.

"You mistake, friends," said Grace; "this picture is the likeness of a dear friend of mine, a relative of Mr. Dupree, but was painted by a Mr. Warren, whom nobody knows. Is it not a little curious, that two such excellent artists should, unknown to each other, hit upon the same design? and both paint two such excellent likenesses, simply from memory? for this too was painted from memory by Mr. Warren, and by him presented to the subject of his pencil, Miss Villeta Linden."

"Villeta!" exclaimed Mark, looking hard at Leon, and calling to mind the toast he had drank in the club-room, on the night of his first introduction to the reader—"I have heard that name before; and I think I need not go far to put my hand upon *the* Mr. Warren."

Leon looked quickly around, and saw that he was again the object of universal notice; and believing, as was natural he should under the circumstances, that his secret had been exposed, and that the whole proceeding had been previously arranged for a public insult, he turned to Julian St. Cloud, with a fierce, defiant air, and said, in a hissing tone:

"So, you paltry beggar, you were mean enough to

get my confidence, and my money, and then betray me! By ——! sir, you shall answer for this!"

"I rather think you are betraying yourself," replied Julian, with quiet contempt. "Do I understand you to acknowledge that you have visited Miss Linden under the assumed name of Warren?"

"And suppose I have, sir! what then?" demanded Leon, with angry vehemence.

"Then," replied Julian, walking up to him, and looking him fiercely in the eye, "I suppose you to be a deceiver, a liar, and a villain!"

"Hold!" said Grace, interposing, as she saw Leon measuring his antagonist with his eye, as if for a blow. "I will have no quarrelling here. What am I to understand from all this? Mr. St. Cloud, did you paint those pictures?"

"Ask Mr. Dupree," answered Julian.

"Miss Grace De Vere," rejoined Leon, with an expression of withering contempt, as the brilliant heiress turned toward him with an inquiring look, "permit me to say, in the presence of this company, that he *did* paint those pictures—that I paid him his own price to keep the secret to himself—that, being a cowardly, treacherous villain, he exposed that secret to you—and you, under the cover of friendship, took this method of exposing me to others, and your own hypocrisy at the same time."

"So," returned Grace, quietly, "I begin to understand the matter! Your confession, Mr. Dupree, puts my mind at ease; for, until this moment, it has been very much exercised to know whether you painted both those pictures or not—Mr. St. Cloud, so far from betraying you in this respect, having rather assisted the

inference that you did. Really, sir, I am inclined to think you belong to that class of the *genus homo*, who, being granted rope enough, never fail to hang themselves. You being Mr. Warren, as well as Mr. Dupree, perhaps you can explain how it happened that you made such haste to get a physician for Lionel Linden and forgot to return? also, what design you had upon his lovely sister? and, lastly, where that sister is now? for that ~~she~~ who was expected here this evening, has been decoyed away from home by some base stratagem, we who know her now feel assured. Leon Dupree," she pursued, sternly, while her eyes flashed fire, as she fixed them upon his changing features, "you may be innocent, but you have the look of a guilty man. If you are guilty, and do any wrong to that sweet girl, may the curse of God light upon you!"

"It will not come any sooner for your invocation," sneered Leon. "And so, permit me to wish you a very good-night."

"Stop!" said Grace, as he turned away and moved toward the door; "allow me to introduce you to my dear aunty in your new character—she being such a warm admirer of you in your old one."

"No, no—Heaven save me! I have seen enough of him!" said Miss Pierson, lifting her hands in holy horror.

"Then," called out Grace to the retreating Leon, "as dear aunty has no desire for further acquaintance with you in either character, permit me to add, that you need be at no trouble to call here again until you can bring some new paintings for our inspection."

As Leon disappeared, leaving the whole party in a

state of surprise and excitement, Julian said a few words to Herbert and Mark, and the three moved quickly toward the door, intending to follow and call him to an account, when the boy Paul, springing quickly forward, intercepted them.

"Stay, gentlemen!" he said, in a quick, excited tone: "do not follow him! I have my reasons. I know more of this matter than either of you; and if you will remain here till my return, I feel almost certain I can bring you important intelligence of Miss Linden. Stay, for Heaven's sake, till I return!"

And without waiting for a reply, he hurried out of the gallery, and down the stairs, reaching the ground floor just as Leon Dupree was in the act of descending the steps into the street.

"This is strange!" said Julian, pale with excitement; and, with the others, he turned back to Grace, to ask for an explanation, repeating to her the words of Paul.

"I do not know what it means," said Grace; "perhaps the boy has discovered some plot—or suspects one, and thinks he may discover it if left to himself. At all events, you had better remain here till he returns. He is a singular lad—precocious, shrewd, and, I believe, honest. Let us trust him, since we can do nothing better. Oh! God shield dear Villeta from harm!"

"Oh!" almost groaned Julian—"how can I remain quietly here, believing she is in the power of that villain! I must go and seek her."

"Stay!" said Grace; "you know nothing; and might, through rashness and indiscretion, mar all. Trust Paul, who has given us words of hope, and let us wait here till he returns."

Leaving the whole party in a state of excitement—and Grace and Julian, especially, fairly trembling with apprehension—let us follow Leon Dupree.

CHAPTER XXX.

THE FOWLER VISITS HIS SNARE.

"A CURSE upon that painting of Villeta!" said Leon, mentally, as he walked quickly down the street. "Fool that I was to overlook it, and leave it with Villeta, and then present Grace with another like it! I might have known that, being now intimate with Villeta, she would see it, and draw a conclusion leading to the exposure of my assumed name, even should St. Cloud not be treacherous enough to direct attention to it, which I believe he did. It was a bungling piece of business, take it altogether, and has resulted just as I might have foreseen, had I kept my wits about me. Well, the secret is out at last; the exposure is made; I felt it must come, sooner or later; and now that it is over, I am glad of it; for now will I boldly defy them, and plot against them, and no longer play the hypocrite, which is a character unsuited to my daring nature—a character fit only for little mean villains and cowards. By ——! they shall yet be made to curse the hour they ever dared insult me; for if I live, I will have my revenge—and such revenge as shall make them quail! So, Mrs. Leslie did not betray me; but no thanks to her; it was only because she feared exposure herself; and now that I have

nothing to dread, her dear friends shall know what delectable company they keep. She dared to threaten me, if I ventured to see Villeta again, I remember; but, ha! ha! I shall see her again, and she will not be by to lift her warning voice. It was a bold game I played—but it was successful, and the stakes are mine. To entrap her on the very night she was to visit Gracco, was a plan worthy of myself! and its execution, I doubt not, does equal credit to my fair accomplice. And such a short time, too, as we had to act! It was near night when I learned from Paul that she was to come in the private carriage of Grace—but that was time enough for one who had everything prepared for just such an event. And Paul has acted nobly, in keeping me advised of all that he has chanced to overhear, and he shall have his reward. Ha! ha! poor fools! poor simpletons! they little dream that I have a spy in their very midst! and that I can get at their secrets, and foil their plans, and keep my own concealed! By heavens! I should have been born a courtier during an intriguing reign! I should then have been in my glory; and if I had not worked my way to the position of prime minister, my talents would have made less display than I am now willing to put to their credit. Well, well, now to be on my guard. I may be watched—but I will take care that the spy, whoever he be, shall have nothing to boast of through my imprudence. I do wonder what the poor astonished fools are saying of me now! Well, no matter—I have only to wait till I see Paul, and then I shall know all. Meantime, I will amuse myself for an hour or two, by which time the coast will be clear; and then, ho! for the unrivalled, the charming, the lovely, the adorable Villeta!"

Leon continued to walk down Chestnut street for several squares, and then turned into a fashionable billiard saloon, where he amused himself for more than an hour; after which he came out and repaired to the club-house, where he drank a bottle of wine, and passed several merry jokes with his companions; and then leaving the club-house by himself, he quietly sauntered down to a hack-stand, entered a coach, gave the driver some instructions in a low tone, and was driven swiftly away.

Leon, as we have shown in his mental soliloquy, had entertained a suspicion that he might be watched; but his precautions had failed to elude the vigilance of the voluntary spy upon his actions—for that spy was Paul Mortvie, who had a motive for his watch too deep to be baffled by any ordinary means. The boy had followed him from the De Vere Mansion to the billiard-room, had waited quietly and patiently outside for his reappearance, had followed him thence to the club-house, and lastly to the hack stand, and as the coach now drove away, he pursued it on a run, till he came to a part of the street sufficiently dark for his purpose, when, with the fleetness of the deer, he bounded up to the vehicle and sprung up behind.

The coach was driven rapidly toward the Schuylkill, till beyond the thickly settled portions of the city; and then, as it turned off toward the north, some further directions were asked of Leon by the driver. At length, after some half an hour's fast driving, the vehicle was brought to a halt, in a dark and unsettled portion of the town, and at least some fifty yards from the nearest dwelling. Here Leon got out and paid the hackman, who immediately drove away—

the boy meantime slipping off, and retreating to such a distance as to be effectually concealed by the darkness.

As soon as he found himself alone, the young villain set off, at a quick walk, toward the dwelling alluded to, which stood alone, and at a considerable distance from any other building. It stood back from the unpaved street, and had a small yard in front, enclosed by white palings, and a fine garden in the rear, enclosed by a high, strong wall of masonry. Leon tried the gate of the front yard; but finding it fastened, he placed his foot upon a cross-bar, and sprang lightly over the top of it; and hurrying to the door, he rung the bell—the boy, meantime, drawing close up under the gate, in a crouching attitude. Presently a window shutter opened cautiously, and a voice, in a low, guarded tone, inquired, in a foreign accent:

“Who is there?”

“It is me,” answered Leon, in a whisper. “It is all right without—is it so within?”

“The bird is caged,” was the reply; “all right—wait a moment.”

The shutter was closed cautiously, and immediately after there was heard a rattling at the door, which opened the next moment and admitted Leon. As the door closed behind him, the boy started up, looked eagerly at the building, ran completely around the entire enclosure, and then darting away, like a frightened deer, disappeared in the darkness.

Leon Dupree was conducted into the parlor by a no less personage than Madam Chevenceau, whose name has been previously mentioned as the proprietress of

the millinery establishment, where Marie Souloni and others, as young and beautiful and innocent, were thrown into the society of such heartless villains as Leon Dupree, and thus led to their ruin. "The Madame," as she was styled by the young bloods who courted her society, and paid her large sums for the most infamous of purposes, was a handsome woman of thirty, with black hair, expressive dark eyes, a full fair face, and a fine, commanding, matronly form.

The expression of her features was highly intellectual and pleasing, and she could assume a charming *naïveté*, that seemed perfectly incompatible with a bad heart, and which never failed to deceive the innocent and unsuspecting. And yet at heart she was utterly vile—cold, selfish, unfeeling, avaricious—caring for no one beyond his or her means, or the advantageous use she might make of the party. During her infamous career, she had accumulated wealth; and was the owner of more than one dwelling, including the one she now occupied; all of which she used for the vilest purposes, or rented, at extravagant prices, to persons of the most disreputable character. If she had a favorite, that favorite was Leon Dupree—not from any personal regard, for in her heart she despised him and the whole human race—but because he was lavish of his money, and paid most liberally for her favors, and gold was her god. It was to her he had applied, after his quarrel with Mrs. Leslie, to aid him in his scheme against Villeta; and for a stipulated sum she had readily entered into his plans, promising him success. We may add, that she did not reside permanently in this house, but kept it ready for an emergency, leaving it generally in charge of a servant;

who, in all things, understood and acted according to her wishes; she repairing hither, to superintend in person, whenever occasion demanded. She had been located here some three or four days prior to this eventful night, watching, like a spider in its web, for a favorable opportunity to entangle another victim, but causing it to be given out that she had gone to a neighboring city on business. For the rest, the following conversation will serve for sufficient explanation of the manner in which her vile purpose had so far been accomplished.

"So, my dear madame," said Leon, in a low, guarded tone, as he seated himself in the elegantly furnished parlor, "you have succeeded?"

"Yes," replied Madame Chevenceau, "as I told you, the bird is caged."

"Where is she?"

"Up stairs, in the Close-Room—shall I conduct you to her?"

"Presently—I want to talk a little first, and settle my nerves. A bottle of wine, if you please."

The bottle of wine was produced, both drank, and Leon resumed:

"Now tell me all about it—did you have any difficulty?"

"Less than I expected, for I remembered your instructions, and followed them closely," replied the French milliner. "As soon as I got word from you that she was to go out in a carriage this evening to Miss De Vere's party, I sent for a trusty coachman—a fellow who has served me well on more than one occasion—and telling him what I wanted, and how he must conduct himself, we drove down to Mrs. Leslie's,

getting there just at dusk. I was afraid we might be too late, or that the other carriage might come while we were there, but fortune was propitious. Mrs. Leslie was away; and Miss Linden, on being informed that Miss De Vere had sent for her, and was anxious that she should come without delay, made no further objections than that she must stop to write a note. This done, she hurried out and entered the carriage; but seemed quite surprised to find me inside; for I had kept myself concealed, and the coachman only had spoken to her. But I quickly set matters right, by informing her that I was a personal friend of Miss De Vere, and had volunteered to come for her in my own carriage, as our mutual friend's was at that moment engaged in another quarter. I said this, because I thought it likely she must know Miss De Vere's carriage, and might otherwise suspect something wrong."

"Very clever in you," smiled Leon, tossing off another glass of wine. "Well?"

"Well, I next informed her that we had to ride some distance, to take up another lady, who had no carriage; and having thus accounted for time, I launched forth, in an animated style, and, I flatter myself, made myself very agreeable, if not charming."

"I will swear you did," smiled Leon, filling both glasses—"for you have the most fascinating conversational powers and manners of any lady I ever saw. Come! here is to ourselves—great in scheming, perfect in executing, and always successful!"

"I drink that toast with all my heart," smiled Madame Chevenceau.

"Well, now, proceed—I am eager to reach the finale," said Leon.

"The finale is reserved for you," said the other, archly, "and you are to be envied. Had I been a man, with such temptation before me, I should have played traitor and run off with the prize."

"Had you been a man," returned Leon, with a light laugh, "I should not have trusted you with my secret. But go on, and tell me how you succeeded in getting her into the house."

"Well, it was quite dark when we reached here; and telling her this was the residence of the lady of whom we were in quest, I got out of the carriage, and ran in, to see if she were ready. Returning to the street, I informed our prize that my friend would be with us in five minutes; and I was just in the act of getting into the carriage again, when the coachman, who had his cue and knew his part, suddenly discovered that one of the axles was cracked; and forthwith announced the disagreeable fact that he would not dare to drive any further with us; but, if we would have patience for fifteen minutes, he would return with another coach. What were we to do? I fretted some, but finally told Miss Linden there was no help for it, and that we must go in and wait. She of course assented; and on entering the house, my servant met us, and, on learning from me what had happened, invited us both up stairs, to lay off our bonnets, and so forth, while we should remain—adding, that her mistress was dressing, but would be with us in a few minutes. In a word, we conducted the bird to her cage, without the slightest suspicion on her part that she was caught; and in that cage you will find her now, flapping her wings, but in no mood for singing her sweetest lay."

"Madame Chevenceau," said Leon, with a look of admiration, as he again filled the glasses, "you have surpassed yourself! Allow me to drink your very good health—the very good health of the greatest woman of the age! 'Pon my honor," he added, as he set down an empty glass, "it is the best managed affair I ever had a hand in: henceforth I trust no one, employ no one, but your beautiful self. Capital! capital! But pray go on—tell me all that has happened since you got her safely caged."

"Well, for an hour or more," resumed "The Madame," "she remained in her cage, without the shadow of a suspicion—I doing myself the honor of keeping her company, and talking for her amusement, and hoping for your appearance to take her off my hands and make your own explanations.

"But I could not come without creating suspicion," said Leon. "You remember I told you I had an invitation to Miss De Vere's; and not to have gone, and the girl away at the same time, would have given my enemies an opportunity to connect me with her disappearance. Even as it is, I believe they strongly suspect I have had a hand in the matter; but they know nothing, and can prove nothing; and by the time the stupid fools do find out anything for a certainty, I hope to be prepared for the discovery; and then let them make the most of it, and be —— to them! And, moreover, let me add, I wished to be there for another reason—to hear what they might say concerning her non-arrival, and how they would account for her absence."

"But could you not have got away sooner?" inquired the hostess.

"Yes, I should have been here sooner, only that I got into a quarrel with one or two insolent puppies—Mark Wellsford for one—and fearing a spy might be set upon my movements, I took the precaution to visit other places just to baffle him."

"Well," pursued Madame Chevenceau, "as I was saying, I kept our bird quiet for more than an hour, by which time I began to grow tired of the labor, and she to get uneasy. At last, seeing there was no help for it, I told her, plainly, that she would not be permitted to leave the room she was in, till a certain friend of hers, who was every moment expected, should arrive to take her away. She became alarmed, asked me what I meant, declared her belief in some foul play, and finally burst into tears and put on several hysterical airs. Not being in a mood to stand such nonsense, and believing a hearty crying fit would do her good, and tame her down for you, I went out, and locked her in. I have not seen her since; but Bessie has been in two or three times, and the last time she reported her quite docile."

"By heavens! I am almost afraid to see her!" said Leon, not particularly pleased with the treatment Vileta had received, which he considered harsh and cruel, though he took good care not to let his hostess perceive his dissatisfaction.

"Why, you are not afraid of that chit of a girl, I hope!"

"Only of her tongue, madame; and perhaps, if I drink her health some half a dozen times, I shall gain courage enough to meet even that."

Leon continued to talk and drink, till he had emptied the bottle, when he immediately called for an-

other; and having about half drained this, and consumed an hour in conversation, he arose, with the flush of partial inebriation, and said :

"Now, madame, I am ready to face the d——l ! Lead the way !"

And forthwith Madame Chevenceau lighted him up the stairs, and gave him the key to the apartment in which poor Villeta Linden was held a prisoner.

CHAPTER XXXI.

HAWK AND DOVE.

THE apartment in which Villeta was confined, was of moderate dimensions, was elegantly furnished, and had a single window opening upon the roof of a veranda and overlooking the garden. The only peculiarities of the room which we shall notice, were—first, its central position in the building, there being small apartments on either side of it; secondly, its single window, with its Venetian shutter, secured by a padlock, with a heavy, folding shutter to bolt within; and thirdly, a sliding partition, which could cut off the window altogether, thus isolating it from every main wall, and rendering it impossible for a shriek or scream to be heard without the building. That it had been constructed for a most infamous purpose, and had been more than once put to a most infamous use, will be readily believed by whoever considers the character of the vile owner.

On a seat near the window, which at this time was

only secured by the outside shutter, sat poor Villeta, the picture of distress, alarm, and dismay. She had wept the fountain of her tears dry; and now sat, with ashen cheeks and swollen eyes, unconsciously wringing her hands, in silent despair, and starting nervously, almost deliriously, at every unusual sound. And sitting thus, she heard steps without, and low voices, followed by the noise of a key being placed in the lock; and starting to her feet, and riveting her eyes upon the door, with a glaring expression, she saw it open, and the person known to her as Henry Warren, enter.

"Good evening, Miss Linden," he said, blandly, and with a show of respect, as he closed the door, locked it inside, and removed the key. "I hope I find you well. It has been an age since I saw your charming features, and the sight of them brings up most pleasant memories."

Villeta walked quietly up to him, and fixed her eyes searchingly upon his face; but her eyes glared, and gave an unnatural expression to her features—so much so, that Leon, as he looked at her, became startled, fearing she had lost her reason.

"Pray tell me, sir," she said, in a quiet, measured tone, "what does all this mean?"

"It means, my dear Miss Linden, that I am your most devoted admirer," replied Leon, with an air of gallantry, though with a slight feeling of uneasiness. "It means that I love you almost to madness; and that, being denied the boon of seeing you where you were, I planned to have you quietly removed to a place where I could speak to you with freedom."

"In other words, I am your prisoner?" said Villeta.

"Why, prisoner is a harsh term," answered Leon, with a smile: "I trust, my dear Villeta, you will not look upon me as an unfeeling jailor!"

"Is your name Leon Dupree?" inquired Villeta, in the same steady, measured tone, keeping her eyes fixed upon the young villain in the same steady manner.

"Why, yes, my name is Leon Dupree, at your service," he answered, boldly. "Henry Warren was a name assumed for the occasion—but there being no longer any necessity for retaining it, I frankly acknowledge the deception."

"Did Mrs. Leslie know you as Leon Dupree?"

"She certainly did."

"Then she deceived me?"

"Yes, she deceived you—she was paid by me to do so."

"But she repented of her part in the base transaction, did she not?"

"In so much as to fear getting herself into difficulty. Mrs. Leslie is a bad woman, and the less you have to do with her the better."

"And are you not afraid of getting yourself into difficulty by your high-handed course?" pursued Villeta, in the same quiet tone.

"Oh, no—I would risk every thing for your love," answered Leon. "Come, let us sit down and talk like friends."

"Friends!" said Villeta, almost fiercely, her eyes glaring, and her form towering, till she looked like an angry queen. "Do you *dare* to face me, sir, after your base transactions, and claim to be my friend?"

"You see I do face you, and I do claim to be your friend," replied Leon, coolly.

"I forgot," returned Villeta, with a flash of scorn : "you are Leon Dupree, son of Basil Dupree, and are therefore capable of any thing that would put to shame an honorable man!"

"You are quite complimentary, my pretty one," rejoined Leon, with a slight curl of his lip. "Pray proceed! Having just drank a bottle of wine to your health, I am prepared for almost any thing in the shape of flattery."

"Talk to me of *love* and *friendship*, when my father was murdered by yours! when my brother was murdered by you!" cried Villeta, shrinking back with a shudder. "Begone, sir, ere the curse of God falls upon you!"

"Stop!" said Leon, turning pale : "you rave—you do not consider what you say! You forget that your father robbed the bank and fled to escape detection! and that your brother died a death which his physician had predicted!"

As Leon said this, the naturally lovely features of Villeta took on a strange, wild expression—an expression which changed her whole appearance, and made her almost fearful to behold; and walking deliberately up to the astonished villain, she raised her finger, and with impressive gestures, and in a tone cold, hard and stern, a tone most unnatural to one whose wonted voice was music, she said :

"My father was an honest man, and is now in Heaven. The money he was said to have taken from the bank, was taken by your father, and much of it has been spent by you in your career of wickedness. My brother was doomed to die by the decree of Heaven. The *immediate* cause of his death, however, was not

a natural one—for you were present, and you had a base design in view, as you have confessed. Leon Dupree, beware! there is a limit even to villainy; and the sword of justice is suspended above your head, and your father's head, only by a single hair."

"Pshaw!" exclaimed Leon, with a feeling of uneasiness, which he struggled to throw off: "let us quit this recrimination, change the subject, and talk sensibly! I am told you are my cousin, and an heiress!"

"It is said I am your cousin, once removed," returned Villeta. "I knew it not till to-day, and sorry am I to think it true. You probably knew it before Lionel died; and having got rid of him, are now ready to put me out of the way, that there may be no division of the Ackland property."

"You do me great injustice," answered Leon, with mock sincerity. "It was not till within a few days—since your brother's death, in fact—that I accidentally learned of our relationship, and of your expectations. So far from wishing to put you out of the way, I love you most sincerely, fair cousin, and would make you my wife. This may be a strange place, considering all the circumstances, to tell you so; but if I have taken unusual means to make my love manifest—to compel you, if I must so speak, to hear me—it is because I have been shut out from your sweet presence, and no other way was open to me."

"And do you for a moment suppose I will consent to become your wife?" answered Villeta, with indignation, her eyes sparkling, her form again towering, and her bosom heaving.

"You might do worse," said Leon, quietly. "I do not like to boast—but, really, I am inclined to think

I stand quite as high in the community as yourself. And you should remember, my pretty one, before you take on extraordinary airs, that you cannot become an heiress *de facto*, (excuse the Latin term,) till you have proved yourself legitimate, which may be less easy to do than you suppose; and until you shall have become an heiress *de facto*, I shall make no effort to compel you to become my lawful wife."

"And do you flatter yourself you could *compel* me to wed one I now despise?" returned Villeta, almost fiercely. "Mark you! the animal has an instinct which warns it against its natural and deadly foe, and it sometimes happens that we human beings are warned against our fellow enemies by something which partakes more of instinct than reason. When you first came to me in my distress, and afforded me hope of relief, and subsequently brought me relief, I felt grateful to you as the immediate cause of happiness, supposing your motives to be honorable—and I should have experienced the same feeling of gratitude toward any other human being—so that, in this respect, you received only what was due to the act, without regard to the individual; but when you afterward, presuming upon my good nature and the claim you had to my forbearance and respect, approached me with a subject and in a manner not warranted by our acquaintance, I was compelled to look upon you in a different light; and then it was I was warned by instinct to shun you as one to be feared. I now perceive that those instinctive warnings were true; for now that the mask is off, I behold you as a base, treacherous, unprincipled young man, and despise you accordingly. Think you, sir, after this confession, I would go to the altar, and solemnly vow to love, honor, and obey you?"

"But you may be glad of the opportunity to go to the altar, and solemnly vow to love, honor, and obey me," returned Leon, coldly.

"There must be a great change in my nature first," returned Villeta: "meantime, you are at liberty to think what you please; but until you see such a change in my nature as shall warrant your return to the subject, you will greatly oblige me by keeping your speculations to yourself."

"I am certainly much obliged to you, for your kind permission to think what I please," returned Leon, in a sneering tone, as he quietly placed himself upon a sofa, in a lounging attitude; "and I trust you may be induced to go still further, and grant me the privilege of *acting* as I please!"

"Set me free—let me go in peace, and henceforth leave me in peace—and, for the rest, may your thoughts and actions be such as you will not repent of in your dying hour!" returned Villeta, solemnly.

"Whatever may be your merits as a literary lady," rejoined Leon, "you certainly are a very poor judge of human nature, if you expect me to adopt such very commonplace advice. No, no—it has cost me too much thought, too much money, too much labour, to get you where you are, to let you go so easily. You just now volunteered some personal remarks, to which I did myself the honor to listen—and now, I pray you, listen to me. Sit down—you will fatigue yourself by standing, and Heaven only knows when I shall get through talking to you. There, that is right—you might have taken a seat nearer—but no matter, so you are comfortably seated. Well, you remember the night I first saw you?—of course you do, how could

you forget it?—but you do not remember the first time I saw you, because you did not see me. You passed me on the street, on your way to a pawnbroker's ; and the moment I beheld your face, I was struck with your beauty ; and, as regards female beauty, you may take my word for it, I am a connoisseur : I was struck with your beauty, I say, and saw, by your dress, you were poor ; and I followed you—followed you to the pawnbroker's, and back to your home—and then hit upon the plan I adopted, and forthwith made your acquaintance.

“ Now,” continued Leon, with the cool and easy assurance of a hardened villain, “ though I really think I fell in love with you at first sight—how could it be otherwise, with such beauty as yours before me?—I do not remember that I had the remotest intention of making you my wife ; nor, to be frank with you, do I think such an idea ever entered my mind, till I learned the possibility of your becoming an heiress of considerable wealth : not that mere money would induce me to marry you—oh, no ; but the truth is, I have a passion for you, think you a very beautiful and superior person, and a fortune is of course an object to one who takes a delight in expensive luxuries, and a pride in scattering money with a liberal hand. On the whole, if you can prove yourself legitimate, I think you will suit me ; and you may consider this a compliment, for I am very fastidious. Meantime, I wish you to understand that I came here to-night to declare my passion, and that my proposition of marriage is a consideration depending upon future contingencies. In other words, though I admit I love you, and you only—love you, in fact, as never woman was loved before—it would

not fulfil my own and my father's expectations, were I to unite myself with a lady without fortune. You cannot say I am not frank in speaking as I do—too frank, perhaps, to win your esteem; but then you must consider frankness one of my failings, and bear with me accordingly; and besides, as you, if I may credit your own statement, despised me before, perhaps, after all, I shall lose nothing by the confession."

"I am only surprised," said Villeta, with scorn, "to find you have sufficient frankness to confess yourself a villain; but this only proves that you are one of those hardened wretches who glory in villainy, and have no compunctions of conscience. But proceed with your cowardly insults till your tongue wearies! and then, I suppose, I shall be permitted to depart and meditate upon what I have heard."

"When I shall have done with you, you will be permitted to depart!" returned Leon, smothering his anger—for he was one of those cool, calculating villains, who consider it beneath their dignity, as well as impolitic, to be betrayed into a display of temper.

"And once I am free," said Villeta, with spirit, "you shall be made to suffer for this outrage, if there be any law in the land which can reach you!"

"Poh! that for your law!" returned Leon, snapping his fingers. "Law is for the poor—the rich are beyond its reach. And besides, my dear angel, you are not going immediately, you know; and therefore, till the time of your departure draws nigh, I should be foolish to borrow apprehension."

"You certainly do not intend to keep me here a prisoner?" cried Villeta, with an expression of alarm.

"Only a short time, my dear cousin; only a few

days, in fact; only till such time as any little nervous excitement you may take on shall have died away."

"A few days! good heavens! what do you mean?" cried Villeta, becoming more and more alarmed. For though, before seeing Leon, she had been apprehensive of something terrible—not knowing at whose instigation she had been brought here, nor for what purpose—yet, after seeing him, her apprehension had merged into indignation; and for the time she had overlooked her situation, and the fact that she was indeed a prisoner beyond the reach of friends. "Surely," she added, "you do not seriously intend to imprison me here for days?"

"Why, that depends upon circumstances," answered Leon. "If you conduct yourself properly, and do not get nervous and take on airs, perhaps I may consent to your departure as early as to-morrow."

"To-morrow!" cried Villeta: "no, no—to-night! to-night!—*now*!"

Leon uttered a short, mocking laugh.

"Why, you poor, innocent beauty! do you really seriously suppose I will let you go now?"

"Why not?"

"Can you not guess, sweet one?"

"Merciful God!" cried Villeta, catching the expression of his eye, and beginning to comprehend his infamous design; "you do not intend to proceed to acts of violence! No, no—you *dare* not—you know I have friends—and that, sooner or later, you will be called to an account for your villainous deeds!"

"Hark you, pretty one!" said Leon, rising and passing over to Villeta, who started up in alarm, and looked around in terror; "I do not want to harm you

—but, on the contrary, to treat you very gently—to treat you as a lady should be treated; for, whether you believe me or not, I love you—love you fondly, devotedly—love you almost to madness—and I shall be proud, and happy, to kneel at your feet, your acknowledged slave: But do not, I pray you, threaten me with the vengeance of your friends—for threats only excite my baser passions, and can be productive of no good, since I am no coward, and do not fear mortal man. Do not say I dare not do so and so—because I *dare* do anything that suits my pleasure. Remember, I dared plan to have you brought hither—I dare detain you—and I may dare do something still worse, if you persist in your efforts to provoke and defy me!”

“Would to God you dared become an honest, honorable man, in spite of your evil passions and propensities!” exclaimed Villeta.

“You are facetious, sweet one.”

“Dare to do right—dare to return me to my friends, and I will forgive what is past.”

“I doubt not you are merciful and magnanimous, as well as beautiful,” rejoined Leon, with a sardonic smile; “but, really, I do not at present feel inclined to thwart myself. If by setting you free, and restoring you to your friends, I could be sure of winning your love and esteem, and having access to you at all proper times, I think I should be tempted to do so; but then, I have very recently discovered—to-night, in fact—that your friends are not mine, and I fear their doors might be closed against me. In a word, it suits me much better to keep you where you are at present, for here there will be no one to step between

us. Come, let us sit down together as friends, and talk of love, and dream of bliss."

And as he spoke, Leon dropped into a seat, and took hold of Villeta, to draw her down beside him; but she sprung away from him, and ran to the opposite side of the room, her sweet, lovely features expressive of the wildest alarm.

"Now I see you are challenging me for a kiss!" he said, gaily, starting up and moving toward her.

"Back!" she cried, in terror: "do not approach me, do not touch me again, or I will shriek for help!"

"And who will come if you do, my angel?" returned Leon, stopping in front of her.

"Oh, God help me!" cried the poor girl, looking fearfully around her, and wringing her hands in despair.

"Come, come—do not be alarmed!" said Leon. "I will not harm you—I only want a sweet kiss from your tempting lips. Give me that, and we will be friends; and that, I am sure, will cost you little trouble and no pain."

"Back, monster!" cried Villeta, "If you dare to touch me again, I will shriek for help!"

"A challenge! upon my honor, a challenge!" rejoined Leon, with spirit. "Now may I never be called a gentleman again, if I do not have a kiss, whether you will or no!"

And as he spoke, he seized Villeta, who again sprung away from him, with a wild, piercing shriek, leaving a portion of her dress in his hands.

"Come," said Leon, coolly, "this grows interesting—that was the first gun of the battle. Now, my dear

Villeta, this shrieking is all very foolish, and will put me to the trouble of closing up the room, and I was in hopes you would be sensible enough to render such a proceeding unnecessary. Do you observe that inside shutter? I must close that. And do you also observe that sliding partition? I must close that too. And all this trouble for a single kiss. But I will have it, you may rest assured of that: ay, and as you are obstinate, I will have two. Ha!" he said, going to the window, which was raised for ventilation, though guarded by Venetian blinds, which were fastened by a padlock: "I have been imprudent to overlook this!" and with his hand he drew down the window. "Now *will* you be so obstinate as to compel me to bolt you in here like a maniac? You must perceive it is only a matter of time, causing trouble and delay, but altering nothing in the end—for kiss you I will, if I die for it! Come now, fair cousin, be reasonable and rational!"

"Oh, God help me!" exclaimed Villeta, looking wildly around, and trembling like an aspen. "Oh, God help me!" she repeated, sinking down upon a sofa, and burying her face in her hands.

"What! in tears, my darling!" said Leon, leaving the window and advancing to her side. "Nay, dearest, you must not weep!" he added, seating himself upon the same sofa, and gently taking hold of her arm.

As she made no resistance, he became emboldened, and attempted to pass his arm around her neck; but the moment his hand touched her golden locks, she again started up, uttered another wild, piercing shriek, and again sprung away from him, to the opposite side of the room.

"By heavens!" cried Leon, starting up to follow her; "I will dally no longer. Now, proud, obstinate beauty, will I give you a taste of my invincible will!"

He had started toward her, the light of fierce passion gleaming from his dark eyes, when suddenly his steps were arrested by a noise at the window. The next instant the shutter was wrenched open by a strong hand; the window itself was dashed in with a loud, startling crash; and a fine, manly figure came bounding through the aperture into the apartment, followed by another, and another, and still another.

CHAPTER XXXII.

TRAGIC SCENES.

"OH, Julian!" cried Villeta, as in the foremost figure she recognised the well-known form of him she loved: "Oh, Julian! oh, Julian!" and, half frantic with joy, she threw herself into his arms, hid her face upon his manly breast, and burst into tears.

"Dear, dear Villeta!" cried Julian, clasping her fondly to his heart, and trembling in every nerve with a thousand strange, wild emotions. "Oh, my dearest Villeta, thank God I have you once again!"

"Oh, Julian, God heard my prayer!" faintly murmured the sweet girl, as she still tremblingly clung to that manly form, which was destined to uphold and guard her evermore on her journey through life.

The three who had followed Julian through the window, were Herbert, Mark, and the boy Paul; and

ere Leon had fairly recovered from his stupefied amazement, the lawyer stood before him, almost foaming with anger.

"This is your work, is it?" he exclaimed; and as he spoke, he raised one of those huge fists which Leon had that very evening made sport of, struck the young villain a blow in the face, and knocked him down. "There," he added, "as I am a man of few words, I will let you gather my opinion of you from that."

"Oh, you scoundrel!" said Mark, as Leon slowly gathered himself upon his feet, his lip cut and bleeding—"you have not only disgraced yourself, but all who ever had the misfortune to associate with you. Take that from me, as a public insult, and resent it when, and where, and how you dare!" and with the flat of his hand, as he spoke, he struck Leon on the cheek.

Both Herbert and Mark instantly put themselves on their guard, expecting Dupree to make some retaliating demonstration; but instead, to their great surprise, he turned aside, and sat down, and very coolly commenced wiping the blood from his lip with his handkerchief.

"Are you a coward as well as a villain?" inquired Mark, tauntingly.

Leon looked up, and Mark shrunk back, for he saw an expression in his eye which made him quail. The features of Leon were deadly pale, and his lips were quivering—which might have been from excitement, fear, or rage, or all combined; but that eye—that black, piercing, fiery eye, as it shot forth its gleams of fiendish malice—was terrible. Without deigning a reply to the insults of Mark, Leon turned his gaze

from him, much to his relief, and swept the room with a quick, eager glance, as if to note the position of everything in it—the glance seeming to rest upon no object except the face of Paul, who was standing near the window with folded arms, and only on him for a single instant.

Then Leon slowly rose, and merely saying, "You take me at advantage, gentlemen," walked over to the light, which stood upon a kind of dressing bureau.

"Seize him!" cried Julian, who had just placed the sobbing and half-fainting Villeta upon a seat. "Seize the villain! He must not, shall not, escape!"

He had just made a step toward Leon, and Herbert and Mark had done the same, when Dupree suddenly dashed out the light, involving the whole party in darkness.

"Now, then, it is my turn!" almost shouted the desperate villain.

And scarcely were the words spoken, when the voice of Mark exclaimed, in thrilling tones of anguish:

"Oh, God help me! I am stabbed!"

"And I am cut!" cried Herbert; "the villain has cut me on the arm!"

Villeta, at the same moment, uttered a piercing shriek, and cried:

"He is here! he is here! Oh, God help us!"

"Death to the villain!" shouted Julian; and as he made a spring in the darkness, toward what he supposed to be Leon, he stumbled against a chair, and fell heavily over it.

It was a scene of horror—there, in that dark chamber, with the assassin busy in the midst of the terrified party—and shrieks, groans, and exclamations of alarm rung out upon the still night.

Suddenly a dark figure, with the laugh of a fiend, sprung through the window, upon the roof of the veranda, and turned to fly toward the right hand wall, and thus descend to the street—and quick as lightning the boy bounded after him.

“Stop, man of crime and blood!” he cried.

And at the words, a pistol gave out its sharp, clear ring; and Leon, uttering a groan, reeled, staggered, and fell into the garden, the boy boldly leaping after him.

It is not in the power of language to do justice to the scene of horror and alarm, excitement and confusion, which prevailed in that dark chamber.

“Oh, Julian—dear Julian—are you killed?” screamed Villeta.

“No, no, dearest, I am not hurt; but you, darling—you, Villeta?”

“I am safe and unharmed.”

“Thank God for that!”

“Oh, God! forgive me—I am dying!” groaned Mark.

“I am cut in the arm, and the wound is bleeding freely, but I think it is not dangerous,” said Herbert.

“A light—we must have a light!” cried Julian. “If I can only find the door! Ah! here it is—but locked—and I cannot open it.” He pounded on the door; but getting no response, he added: “Remain quiet, dear Villeta, till I go and call the watchmen.”

“Oh, no, Julian, do not go! Dupree may be lying in wait to kill you.”

“I think he is shot—for the boy followed him, and I heard a pistol, and then something like a fall.”

“Perhaps it was he who shot the boy!” said Villeta.

"Oh, merciful God, forgive me!" faintly groaned Mark.

Julian ran to the window and called Paul.

"I am here," answered the boy from below.

"Are you safe?"

"Yes."

"Did Dupree escape?"

"No! he is here, at my feet."

"Dead?"

"No! he breathes."

Julian sprung out upon the roof of the veranda, and shouted for the watch.

"Here!" cried a voice from below: "what's the matter?"

"Murder!" answered Julian; "murder! Break open the door below, and arrest every one you find trying to escape!"

The watchman sprung his rattle, and in a moment it was answered from a distance; and then there came sounds of men running from different quarters toward the scene of alarm.

Julian hurried along the roof of the veranda to the right hand wall, and descended to the ground by a rope-ladder which he and his party had attached to the wall only a few minutes before, and by which they had gained access to the roof and thence to the apartment where Villeta was confined.

To explain the whole matter in the fewest possible words, it is only necessary to state that Paul, after seeing Leon enter the dwelling, as mentioned in a previous chapter, had, by running around the enclosure, discovered that the veranda could be reached by scaling the wall, and thought this the quickest way to

gain an entrance into the building. This information he then conveyed, with all the speed he could use, to the excited party at the De Vere Mansion, reaching the house of Grace, panting and breathless, in something like half an hour from his departure from the house of Madame Chevenceau. Here he found those he sought, awaiting his return in great anxiety, and to them he hurriedly communicated all he had discovered. Grace chanced to have a rope-ladder in the garden ; and ordering out her carriage with all haste, the whole party hurried into it—herself and Mrs. Leslie, who had come to inquire concerning Villeta, making two of the number. Taking his seat with the driver, Paul acted as guide, and the whole party was rapidly driven to within a short distance of the scene. Here the carriage was stopped, and Grace and Mrs. Leslie were left inside, while the others hurried forward to the rescue of the lovely orphan. On reaching the foot of the wall, they all heard Villeta scream, and Julian became nearly frantic with excitement—though he prudently refrained, as did all the others, from speaking above a whisper. Mounting the shoulders of Herbert, Julian was thus enabled to attach the ladder to the wall, and then one after the other hurried up to the roof of the veranda. A light shining through the slats of the Venetian shutters, guided them to the proper window, which they reached just as Villeta uttered her second piercing shriek for help. The rest the reader knows.

On descending to the ground, as we have stated, Julian hurriedly related to the watchman what had taken place ; and then, while the latter communicated the startling news to some of his brother officers, who

came running up in answer to his signal, the former hurried back to the carriage, to repeat his tale to Grace and Mrs. Leslie.

Both ladies uttered exclamations of joy, on learning that the party had been in time to save Villeta ; but were thrilled with horror, at the recital of the tragic scene which had taken place in the darkness.

"Are you sure Villeta is safe?" anxiously inquired Mrs. Leslie.

"I think she is—God forbid it should be otherwise—but I must back, with all speed, and see!"

"And Herbert is wounded!" cried Grace—"perhaps dangerously! We will go with you—we will go with you!"

And springing from the carriage, Grace and Mrs. Leslie took each an arm of the excited Julian, and all hurried to the dwelling of Madame Chevenceau. They found several persons, mostly watchmen, collected before the front door, upon which two or three were thundering for admittance. The next moment a female voice, from an upper window, said:

"In Heaven's name, what is the matter?"

"We're watchmen and policemen, and want to get in and see what's the matter," answered one. "Open your door, in the name of the law, or we'll burst it in. You can't escape—your place is surrounded."

"Wait a moment, and I will open to you," said the voice; and soon after the door was unbolted, and the whole party rushed in, pell-mell.

"Arrest that woman," cried Julian, in a commanding tone, "and then follow me!"

And while two of the party laid hold of the terrified Madame Chevenceau, and informed her that she was

a prisoner, Julian took a lamp from her hand, pushed himself forward, with the ladies, past the night officers, and led the way up the stairs to the room of the tragedy.

"Are you there, Villeta?" he called.

"Oh, yes, yes—quick! quick! burst in the door!"

Two strong men instantly threw themselves against the door, which gave way with a loud crash, and the whole party hurried into the bloody chamber.

With a scream of joy, Villeta flew to the embrace of her friends, and then all turned to look upon the fiendish work of Leon Dupree.

Herbert was sitting upon a sofa, trying to stanch the blood which was still flowing freely from a deep cut on his arm; and Mark Wellsford was lying in the middle of the room, covered with gore, a horrible spectacle. He was lying very still, on his left side, with his right arm thrown over his face, so as to conceal it. One of the men raised his arm, turned him over, and exposed his features, which were pale, bloody, and horribly contorted, the expression being one of pain and terror combined. Hurriedly he felt his pulse, and put his hand upon his heart, near which was a deep gash; and then he said, with thrilling solemnity:

"Poor fellow! *he is dead.*"

All shuddered, and drew back with awe.

"We must not touch him, but summon the coroner," said one.

"It is an awful fate—God rest his soul!" said Grace. "But we must not neglect the living!" she added, as she flew to the side of Herbert, and endeavored to dress his wound—a proceeding in which she was assisted by others.

"For a few moments, a scene of intense excitement and confusion prevailed; and then Julian, elevating his voice above all the others, said:

"Follow me, and let us seek the author of this damning deed, who has himself met with a fearful retribution!"

He led the way down stairs, and out into the garden; and one after another followed him—Herbert, with his now bandaged arm, bringing up the rear with Grace, Villeta, and Mrs. Leslie.

They found Leon Dupree lying upon the ground where he had fallen, groaning with pain; and the boy Paul standing quietly beside him, with folded arms. Paul's features were very pale, and there was a strange, wild light in his eyes, as he surveyed the assembled party—but he manifested no emotion.

"This person," said Julian, in explanation, "is Leon Dupree, who killed Mark Wellsford, and wounded my friend here, Herbert Raymond. In attempting to make his escape, after his bloody work, he was followed by this boy and shot."

"Yes, ladies and gentlemen," said Paul, quietly, but with compressed lips, "I call you all to bear witness, that this work is mine!"

"Oh, Paul, it is terrible!" said Grace, in a kindly tone, as she moved forward to his side. "I am sorry you did not let him go, and let the law reach him."

"*Law!*" exclaimed Paul, somewhat fiercely: "there are crimes which the *law* does not reach."

"But his was not one," answered Grace.

"But I know of one," rejoined Paul.

"You're too young to boast of killing," said one of

the officers, reprovingly. "But," he added, "it's not for me to say who's right or wrong in this matter—our duty is to arrest all parties."

"You will not keep me a prisoner long," returned Paul.

At this moment, while some of the party were about taking up Leon, to bear him into the house, Madame Chevenceau made her appearance upon the scene, accompanied by an officer who had her in charge; and the moment Paul saw her, he started back, and was seized with a nervous trembling, to the great surprise of those who chanced to be observing him.

"Do you know this boy?" said one, turning to the French woman for an explanation.

"I never saw him before," she replied, looking curiously at Paul.

"Liar!" shouted Paul; "and may that lie be your last!" and quick as lightning, before any one could interfere, or even thought of interfering, for no one suspected his design, he drew a pistol, sprung forward, and shot Madame Chevenceau through the heart.

And as the guilty woman fell, the boy uttered a laugh—a wild, maniacal laugh—a laugh that fairly curdled the blood of the horrified spectators.

Instantly Paul was seized, and the pistol taken from him. But no other weapon was found upon him—the pistol with which he had shot Leon having been thrown away as soon as discharged.

"Great God! what terrible scenes!" exclaimed Grace. "But do not handle the boy roughly—he is mad."

"No," said Paul, "I am not mad. I did not know

that woman was here till now ; but while I stood here by the side of Leon Dupree, waiting for him to return to life, that I might say a parting word to him, I was wishing I could meet that woman, to settle my account with her before leaving the world—and, lo ! she came and stood before me."

"But, Paul, she said she did not know you."

"No," returned Paul, "let me correct you, to prove I have my senses. She said she had never seen me before. If you ask Leon Dupree if he ever saw me before the night when Lionel Linden died, he will tell you no. If you ask Mrs. Leslie here, if she ever saw me before that eventful night, she will tell you no. And yet neither will tell you the truth, though they may think it is the truth."

"Me!" exclaimed Mrs. Leslie, in astonishment: "I do not know you at all."

"Did I not say she would deny me?" returned Paul. "Peter denied his Master—why should she remember me?"

At this moment Leon called for water.

"There—he is coming to—let me question him—my time is short!" said Paul, pushing forward toward Leon.

"Stop, boy!" said one of the men, taking hold of him: "you have done enough."

"I can do no harm now," said Paul. "Quick! let me go, and you will hear something to surprise you."

The man released Paul, who instantly sprung to Leon, and dropped down by his side—the whole party crowding around, under the most intense excitement.

"Leon," inquired Paul, "do you want water?"

"Yes, yes," replied Leon, faintly.

"Bring him water," said Paul. And then he added :
"Do you know who is speaking to you, Leon?"

Leon opened his eyes and looked steadily at the boy.

"Let the light shine on my face," said Paul to an officer who was holding a lantern. "There—so !
Now, Leon, do you know me?"

"Yes, you are Paul Mortvie."

"Are you sure?"

"Yes," answered Leon, groaning with pain. "Water ! water !"

"It is coming," said Paul. "Do you know what has happened, Leon?"

"Yes—I am shot."

"Do you know who shot you?"

"I suppose it was one of my enemies. Oh, send for a surgeon ! oh, give me water !"

"All in good time, Leon. Ah ! here is the water. There—drink. Now do you feel better?"

"A little."

"Now look at me—look at me steadily !" said the boy. "It was me that shot you."

"You !" returned Leon, in surprise. "Yes—I remember now. Ah ! Paul, I thought you were my friend."

"I was once. But listen ! You killed Wellsford—do you know it?"

"Good God ! is he dead?" exclaimed Dupree, with a shudder.

"Yes, I overheard these persons saying he is dead."

"I meant not to kill him, but he insulted and struck me. And is Raymond dead too?"

"No—there he stands. And there are Mr. St. Cloud, Miss De Vere, Miss Linden, and Mrs. Leslie—you know them all."

"But what do they here about me?" said Leon, with a touch of anger. "Gentlemen," addressing the strangers around him, "if you are officers, and wish to secure me, take me out of their sight, or take them out of mine."

"They came for Miss Linden, and must needs see all the sights," said Paul. "And Madame Chevenceau is somewhere near—or her body is—but I think she is dead."

"Dead!" exclaimed Leon.

"Yes, I shot her."

"You shot her! for what?"

"I will tell you in a moment," said Paul, taking a small vial from his pocket, and so concealing it in his hand as to be enabled to drink off the contents without letting any one suspect what he was doing. "There! now I am ready for the *denouement*. I shot her, because, leagued with you, she plotted and accomplished my ruin—ruined my peace of mind for this world—damned my soul for the next."

"Good heavens, Paul, what do you mean? are you mad?"

"No, I am not mad—nor am I Paul. You know me by another name."

"Ha!" said Leon, with a wild start, and with an expression of terrified amazement. "Great God! is it possible? Yes, yes—it must be so—I see it now! I have often looked at your face, and wondered where I had seen one like it, and now the truth flashes upon me. You put on false hair, stained your fair skin, disguised your voice, and changed your sex by dress; and the time when, place where, and circumstances under which, I first met you, in your new character, all combined to deceive me. You are ——"

"One who loved you wildly, madly," interrupted the other, passionately: "one who thought you the light of the world, for without you all was darkness; one who thought you the life of the world, for without you all was death; but one whom you loved only to ruin—ruined only to despise—despised only to cast off as a worn out garment! Yes, I am she who was the once proud and happy, but now crushed and miserable, MARIE SOULONI!"

"Marie Souloni!" exclaimed Mrs. Leslie, all amazement.

"A woman!" cried several.

"The victim of a villain!" said Grace.

"Oh! Marie," said Leon, heeding nothing that was said around him, "forgive me! forgive me! as I forgive you for what you have this night done."

"Our accounts are squared," said Marie, bowing her head upon her hands.

"If I live, I will do you justice, dear Marie—I will, so help me God!"

"Our accounts are squared," repeated Marie. "I suspected you of a base design before you took me to the mountains, and I went prepared to return with you, or follow you westward. The same coach which bore you back to this city an inside passenger, bore me back an outside one—and since then I have been a spy upon all your acts. No thought of yours has been given to poor, unhappy Marie; but, instead, you have been planning the ruin of a lovely orphan, and a marriage with one proud and wealthy, yet noble and good. And as you plotted, I counter-plotted; and through me, whom you thought a spy for you, has your scheming been made to end in disgrace, if not

death. I came to-night prepared to expose you, disgrace you, and perhaps put an end to your life. Now can you forgive me?"

"Yes, I do," said Dupree; "for you loved me once, and I did you wrong; but say you forgive me, Marie, and I will atone for the past."

"I forgive you, because our accounts are squared," replied Marie. "You injured me, and I have taken my revenge. I forgive you, because you have forgiven me, and because misery will be the portion of both of us forever. Talk not of atonement for the past. I shall die soon, and you will soon follow; and if we meet in the other world, it will not be in Heaven. There is my hand for the last time. Farewell!"

"Are you going to leave me, Marie?"

"Yes, I am going before you. A few minutes more, and my earthly troubles will cease. Good-by, Mrs. Leslie; good-by, Miss De Vere; you were both kind to me, and I thank you for it now: good-by, Miss Linden; good-by, all; I am going!" and again Marie dropped her head upon her hands, still keeping her position by the side of Leon.

Mrs. Leslie, Grace, and Villeta, all sprung forward, and bent down to her, asking kindly if she were ill.

"Oh, great God! Marie, have you taken poison?" cried Dupree, as a horrible suspicion flashed across his mind.

"I have," said Marie, calmly, raising her head; "and I feel it now in my veins: no power on earth can save me."

"In the name of God and humanity!" exclaimed Leon, wildly, rousing himself up and appealing to the excited spectators—"let not this poor girl die! Run,

some of you, if ye be men with hearts, and bring a physician! Quick! quick! in God's name! I will give a thousand dollars to the man who, by getting a physician in time, saves her life!"

Two or three of the party bounded away ere he had done speaking.

"The physician will come too late," said Marie, quietly: "you need not indulge in a false hope."

"No! no!" returned Leon: "he must not, shall not, come too late! Oh, merciful God! can nothing be done for her? Can you, who stand around here, do nothing?"

"If we knew what to do, and had wherewith to do, the poor girl should not die from any fault of ours," said Grace, excitedly. "What have you taken, Marie?" she anxiously inquired.

"Forgive me for not telling you, for I do not want to live!" replied Marie.

"Oh, yes, Marie—live! live! live!" cried Leon.

The features of the poor girl now began to flush and pale alternately, in rapid succession, and her eyes to grow wild and fiery; and there came shocks, so to speak, of spasmodic contraction of the muscles of the hands, face and body.

"Great God! she is dying!" groaned Leon; "and no physician at hand!"

They took up Marie, whose symptoms of the fatal action of the poison were every moment growing more violent and alarming, and bore her into the front parlor; whither another party also carried Leon, who was almost frantic with excitement; and they took up the body of Madame Chevenceau, who had fallen dead, with scarcely a groan, and bore it into the house also.

In a few minutes a physician came, in breathless haste, and immediately set to work, with his emetics and antidotes, to save the unhappy Marie, who by this time was unconscious and delirious.

We need not dwell upon the scene. The doctor labored under much disadvantage, from not knowing the nature of the poison he had to counteract ; but after two hours of incessant toil, during which he never left her for a single moment, he gave it as his opinion that, with care and careful nursing, she would recover, but considered her in a very precarious condition.

Meantime, a surgeon had arrived to dress the wound of Leon ; but not till the physician announced his hope of being able to save the life of Marie, would he permit the man of science to begin his work. The wound of Leon was in the right groin ; from which, after the labor of an hour, the surgeon succeeded in extracting the ball. It was not this wound, but his fall, which had deprived him of consciousness up to the moment when he called for water in the presence of the assembled party ; and after dressing it, the surgeon stated, in reply to an inquiry, that though he considered the wound severe, painful, and even dangerous, it was not necessarily mortal : much, however, he added, would depend upon the extent of the inflammation which must ensue, and the state of the patient's mind till the crisis should be past.

A consultation was now held among the night officers, as to what should be done with the different parties, all of whom had so far been guarded as prisoners ; and it was finally decided that the ladies—Grace, Villeta, and Mrs. Leslie—should be permitted

to go home; but that Julian and Herbert should be detained for an early hearing before a magistrate—when, as there was no charge against them, they would probably only be required to give bail to appear as witnesses.

During the interval, Mrs. Leslie communicated to Villeta all that had taken place in her absence, and also the facts concerning Marie; and more than a dozen times, with tears in her eyes, she begged her forgiveness for having concealed from her the fact that Warren was Dupree—giving, as a reason, that she had supposed, from what had passed between Leon and herself, that she would henceforth be rid of him, and thus be spared a humiliating confession. And more than a dozen times did Villeta kiss her, and tell her she was forgiven, and that she had been forgiven even before this confession, because she had never doubted that Mrs. Leslie had acted for the best.

When it was finally announced to the ladies that they would be permitted to return home, Mrs. Leslie declared that she would remain with poor Marie; and so Grace and Villeta bade her and their other friends good-night, and departed from the scene of the tragedy.

By request of one of the officers, Grace drove first to the residence of Mrs. Wellsford, rousing the servants at a late hour, and communicating the horrible intelligence concerning Mark. The poor mother, on hearing of the death of her idolized son, became nearly frantic with grief; and at once ordering out her carriage, she set off to visit the house of death, and look upon the bloody remains of him who was, figuratively speaking, her life and hope.

Grace still had another trying and painful task to perform; and from Mrs. Wellsford's she drove to the residence of Basil Dupree. Here, much to her surprise, she found the household astir, and great excitement and confusion prevailing. On inquiring as to the cause, she was shocked and horrified—she who had that night witnessed so much of the horrible—to learn that news had just been received, that the husband and father had committed suicide, and that the wife and mother was already in a state of raving delirium. Grace could learn no particulars of the terrible occurrence; but she had her own terrible news to communicate; and to the family physician, who had just been summoned to attend upon the frantic wife, she hurriedly narrated her thrilling tale.

"My God!" exclaimed the doctor; "what an accumulation of horrible events! The husband and father dead—the wife and mother insane—and the son badly wounded, and accused of a heinous crime. And all crowded into a single point of time! It is shocking—awful—terrible!"

From this house of woe, Grace drove home, taking Villeta with her.

CHAPTER XXXIII.

CONCLUSION.

ON suddenly finding himself arrested and in the power of the officers of justice, so soon after the commission of his last great crime, as mentioned at the

close of a previous chapter, Basil Dupree, who had been so cool and collected in doing his wicked deed, became terribly alarmed and excited, and proposed to give his captors a large amount of money to let him go. But they, unlike some of their successors who might be named, were honest men, and proof against such temptation; and they at once conducted him to the watch-house, where it was their intention to detain him over night, and early in the morning to take him before a magistrate. They had scarcely placed him in his cell, when, bethinking him of the paper which he had previously taken from the Jew, and still carried with him, he made an attempt to destroy it; which, perceiving, and thinking it might be a document of consequence, the officers wrenched from him—though not without a severe struggle, during which the man of crime and blood was knocked down with a mace, and then left half senseless on the floor of his prison.

This paper, being written in German, the officers could not read; but prompted by a laudable curiosity to know its contents, they at once sought a translator, and were astounded and horrified at its bloody details. It related principally to the murder of Eldridge Linden, some five years before, and gave a succinct account of the whole transaction—the writer, Isaac Jacobs, freely acknowledging the part he had taken in that mysterious and bloody affair.

This paper, as the reader knows, had been written by the old Jew, with the revengeful design of criminating and destroying Dupree after his own death—it being his intention, of course, to keep it concealed till after that event—but the reader also knows by what means it was brought to light, and he will shortly see

how its wicked purpose was made to recoil upon its wicked and guilty author.

We will not transcribe the confession—it being sufficient for our purpose to give in brief the facts which bear upon our story.

Some time previous to the murder of Villeta's father, Basil Dupree (who then passed for a poor, but honest and respectable man, and held the situation of teller in — Bank) one night broke open and robbed a jewelry store of a large amount, which he subsequently disposed of to Isaac Jacobs for the sum of two thousand dollars, being about one-fourth of the real value of the articles. This affair led to an acquaintance between the parties, which both sought to profit by—the Jew in carrying out his monomaniac idea of revenge, and Dupree in reaping a golden harvest for his criminal proceedings. Knowing the immediate ancestors of Eldridge Linden and Lucy Dupree to be direct descendants of his detested sister Hagar, old Jacobs thought it a master stroke of revengeful cunning to get Dupree to murder Linden, and thus put one out of the way by the husband of another ; and possibly, by this very crime, he (Jacobs) would get the power to crush the family of Dupree, sooner or later, and at the same time he would increase his chances of cutting off all the Lindens.

Gradually the Jew unfolded his horrid scheme of murder to Dupree, keeping his own design concealed ; and the latter, caring nothing for the motive of the pawnbroker—but seeing a chance, if successful, of realizing a splendid fortune, and escaping detection and even suspicion—consented to attempt the execution of his confederate's plan.

The plan was simply for Dupree to murder Linden, the cashier, rob the bank the same night, and let suspicion fall upon the missing officer; thus he would get paid for his bloody work; while the Jew would have the treble satisfaction of getting one more of his hated relatives out of the way—of seeing the family of the murdered man crushed and blasted by sorrow and disgrace—and of having the family of the murderer more directly in his power. To assist Dupree in the murder, the Jew employed Jack Guthrie, a well known thief and cut-throat, who agreed, for a certain sum, to perform his bloody part, and then leave the country forever.

Prepared, with false keys, to rob the bank the night of the murder, Dupree set to work, with Guthrie, to watch and entrap his victim—the plan being for the parties to act as boatmen for taking passengers across the Delaware after the hour at which the regular ferry boats ceased running—it being known that Linden, who then resided in Camden, New Jersey, very frequently crossed the river at a late hour.

However, it was not till after several attempts, on as many different nights, that they succeeded in finding their victim alone on the wharf, and getting him to enter their boat without suspicion; and then, the night being dark and rainy, they had little difficulty in carrying out the rest of their design. On getting a safe distance from the shore, Jack, at a given signal, suddenly thrust a plaster over the mouth of Linden; and then, assisted by Dupree, held him under water till drowned; after which, that the body might not be recovered, they took it to a well known island, in the middle of the river, and buried it. This done, they

rowed far down the stream, sunk their boat, and entered the city from the south on foot.

That same night Jack got his pay of the Jew for his bloody work, and left for parts unknown; and Dupree, alone, entered and robbed the bank of over four hundred thousand dollars in specie—depositing the same, for the time being, in the cellar of an old, untenanted building, which happened to be standing in the vicinity, and thence removing the amount at sundry times on several successive nights.

The fact of the bank having been robbed by some one who had opened the doors and vault by proper keys, and locked the same after removing the money, united with the fact of the mysterious disappearance of the cashier on the same night, all tended to fix suspicion upon the murdered officer; and thus, as Dupree had hoped and anticipated, he escaped detection; nor was an enemy of his found bold enough, till long after, to connect his name, even in a secret whisper, with the startling transaction.

Nor did Dupree make immediate use of his ill-gotten wealth: he was too cunning for that. For six months he kept steadily at his post as teller, and then announced that he had received news of the death of a wealthy relative in France, who had left him his heir. Soon after this, he threw up his situation and sailed for France, and, by a well contrived plan, managed to get most of his specie over the Atlantic, where he subsequently purchased French drafts, and returned with the same, after an absence of six months, and at once set up for a wealthy man.

In justice to the wife and son of Dupree—who, during his absence, remained in Philadelphia, living

moderately—we must state that they knew nothing of his guilty deeds, but honestly believed his wealth to have been inherited in the manner stated. Each party, however, was ready to begin the spending of an amount which to them seemed infinite; and what with the extravagance of all combined, and some unfortunate speculations which he had entered into during the last of the four subsequent years, Basil Dupree, though still passing for a man of wealth, was, at the date of our story, involved some thousands of dollars beyond the amount of all he owned, and was thus ready for any scheme by which he might regain his wasted fortune.

Having, by means of a translator, got at the substance of the Jew's confession, the officers who arrested Dupree, now considered him a too important personage to be carelessly confined; and, to be certain of his security, they again visited his cell; where, to their surprise and regret, they found, not the living man, but his dead body—he having hung himself to one of the bars of his cell. They at once cut him down, and strove to bring back life; but the spirit had taken its flight into the realms of eternity, to render an account of its wicked deeds before a higher than mortal tribunal.

To arrest Isaac Jacobs was the next important proceeding of the officers, and they set off forthwith to pay him a visit.

The Jew had not retired, but was looking over his different papers, and counting his money, and congratulating himself that Jack Guthrie would trouble him no more, when he was startled half out of his senses, by several loud knocks on his door, accompanied by the stern demand:



“Open, in the name of the law!”

“Law!” muttered Isaac, in German, turning as pale as his sallow and begrimed complexion would permit, and trembling in every limb; “oh! Father Abraham, what does this mean? what has thy poor, decrepit old servant got to do with law at his time of life? Oh! protect and save me this time—just this once—and, so help me! I will make my will, and give all my property to the children of Israel: if I don’t, oh, Holy Father, then never trust me again!”

Again those fearful knocks, and that dread summons:

“Open, in the name of the law!”

“My God!” cried Isaac, starting up—“what will become of me? what will become of me? Oh, great prophet Moses! oh, most holy Father Abraham! do save me! do save me! Oh! I am not fit to die—and they want to murder me. Oh! save me—this time—and I will give every thing I have to the good cause—every thing—every thing—I swear it—oh! yes, I swear it! And remember, if they get in and put me out of the way, great Lord, all my property—my hard-earned property—all my money—will go to the hated Christians—all! all! all!”

“Open your door, Isaac Jacobs, or we shall be compelled to burst it in!” said a loud, stern voice, that thrilled through every nerve and fibre of the guilty Jew, and seemed to him a terrible summons to eternal judgment.

“I will hide!” cried the guilty wretch, trembling like an aspen, while cold perspiration seemed to start from every pore: “I will hide! I must hide, or I shall be murdered! Oh, Lord God of Israel, direct

me where to conceal myself from mine enemies—Thy enemies, good Lord—the enemies of Israel !”

There came a crash at the door—the officers were trying to force it open.

Old Jacobs, in a perfect agony of terror, caught up the light to fly, he knew not whither ; but his old hand trembled like a reed shaken by the wind, all his joints seemed loosened, and he fancied that every bone in his body rattled.

“ Oh ! oh ! oh ! ” he groaned ; “ what shall I do ? what shall I do ? ” and, as he spoke, the light fell from his hand, and was dashed to pieces, involving him in the very blackness of darkness.

Another fearful crash at the door, with a frightful sound, as if it were yielding to the force brought against it.

The Jew, still groaning audibly, and praying for help from on High, staggered forward, and found his way into the entry, and thence to the cellar stairs, down which he was shuffling in haste, when suddenly he fancied he saw a strange light before him, which instantly stretched itself upward into a gigantic human form, and seemed to take on, though hideously distorted the features of the murdered Jack Guthrie.

With a wild shriek of horror, the guilty old man turned to ascend the stairs ; but just at that instant the door above was burst in with a fearful crash ; and he heard harsh voices, that seemed to him to be pronouncing his doom ; and heavy, hollow steps, like men treading upon his coffin. The Jew stopped, and gasped with horror—his brain reeled—his heart grew cold, and he felt a strange shock pass through his system. The next moment, with an unearthly shriek—a shriek

which thrilled with terror those who heard it—the Jew fell heavily, and rolled down the old, worm-eaten, mildewed stairs, and lay still upon the damp earth of the cellar.

When, a few minutes after, the officers descended to him with a light, they found him motionless. They turned him over, looked upon his horribly contorted features, and shuddered as they laid him down. Age, excitement, fear, terror, horror and despair, had placed him beyond the reach of the hangman.

He was dead !

* * * * *

It were useless for us to attempt to portray the wild commotion into which the usually quiet city of Philadelphia was thrown on the day following that dark night of tragedy, as the thrilling news of one terrible event after another rapidly spread over it, like the tainted air of a pestilence, producing a morbid excitement and moral disease : we shall therefore not make the attempt, but leave this to the imagination of the reader, and, in as few words as possible, proceed to sum up the principal events.

There was work for the Coroner and his juries, which lasted for several days ; there was news for the press, which lasted for several weeks ; and there was morbid food for depraved mental appetites, which lasted many for a life-time.

The jury which sat on the body of Mark Wellsford, brought in a verdict, that he came to his death by wounds inflicted by a knife in the hands of Leon Dupree.

The jury which sat on the body of Madame Chevenceau, brought in a verdict, that she came to her death by

a wound inflicted by a ball from a pistol in the hands of Marie Souloni.

A warrant was issued against Leon Dupree ; but on account of his critical condition, the authorities permitted him to be conveyed to the hospital, where he had the best of medical attendance. For two or three days they managed to keep him ignorant of the terrible facts connected with his family ; but the news finally reached him, through the imprudence of a visitor ; and he learned, with a thrill of horror, that his father had died by his own hand, and left a name covered with infamy, and that his mother was a hopeless maniac. From the moment Leon heard this, the surgeon despaired of saving him ; but he lingered several days longer, and then died in great mental and bodily agony. And we may add, in this connection, that the poor maniac wife and mother soon followed her husband and son into the spirit world, and the snows of the succeeding winter spread a white mantle over the dark and silent graves of all.

A warrant was issued against Marie Souloni—who, recovering from the effects of the poison, was conveyed to prison—and on the very day that Leon died, the grand jury found a true bill against her for the murder of Madame Chevenceau.

By the sudden death of the pawnbroker, Villeta Linden recovered the marriage certificate of her parents, which was found among his papers, and which proved of vast importance to her, in settling her claim to the Ackland property and clearing her own name of all dishonor, as her father's had been cleared by the startling revelations which followed the deaths of his murderers. And as the old Jew died intestate, it

was discovered, by means of that singular document of which we transcribed a portion in one of the early chapters of our story, that Villeta was the only legal heir, after the death of Leon and his mother, to his property, and in due course of law she was put in possession of all he had gained through a long life of sin and crime. But she received it only to bestow it in a manner consonant with her own pure and upright character. She would rather, she said, endure, as she had done, the trials of honest poverty, than live in affluence upon money procured through guilt and blood; and so, with what she lawfully inherited from the Jew, she secretly founded a well known charitable institution, and many have lived since to bless the hand that gave.

In the meantime, there turned up some rather curious developments with regard to the deceased Thomas Ackland and his estate. The next packet from Europe brought intelligence that a will had been discovered, which might divert a large portion of his property into a new channel; and as this will materially affected the fortunes of two of our principal characters, besides Villeta, a brief explanation is necessary.

It seems that Thomas Ackland—who, from all accounts, was a strange, eccentric being—in traveling through the southern portion of England, on business, incidentally became acquainted with an American lady, named Ellen Wade, who had just closed an engagement as governess in a distinguished English family, and was on her way to a neighboring seaport, whence she expected to embark for the United States, where she had a mother and sister living in

rather indigent circumstances. Miss Wade was, at this period, about twenty-five years of age, of fine figure, handsome features, and pleasing manners; but Mr. Ackland was small, ugly, and turned of forty. However, after a brief acquaintance, during which he informed her he was quite wealthy, he proposed to her, and she consented to become his wife, on condition that she should be permitted to visit her dear mother and sister in America, of whom she spoke with great affection, and take with her sufficient means to render them comfortable, as they were in some degree depending upon her labors for support.

To be brief, the parties were privately married; but instead of returning to his native place, Mr. Ackland went to Dover, and there for a time took up his residence among strangers. He soon became jealous of his wife without cause; and one quarrel followed another, till finally a separation was agreed upon; and she, full of trouble and sorrow, was about to quit England for her native country, when she was suddenly taken ill, and died in giving birth to her first child. Mr. Ackland, who had not left Dover, saw his wife decently interred; but instead of taking the child home with him, and rearing it as his own, he had it secretly conveyed to a foundling hospital, with instructions to have it named Margaret Colonnell. On returning to Manchester, Mr. Ackland made no mention of his marriage, and at his death he was supposed to be a bachelor. But in his will—made many years prior to his decease, and discovered in a secret drawer some months after his death—he gave a history of the whole affair, and stated that he had always intended reclaiming his child, who had long since mysteriously

disappeared; and he bequeathed her, if living, one hundred thousand pounds; and also to the sister of his wife, Mary Wade—whom he had promised to provide for, but had not—to her, or her heirs, as a compensation for his neglect, the sum of fifty thousand pounds.

Now Margaret Colonnell, as the reader knows, was none other than Mrs. Leslie, who thus unexpectedly found herself an acknowledged legal child, and the heiress of a fortune. But who was Mary Wade? None other than the mother of Julian St. Cloud, who thus unexpectedly received the clearing up of a family mystery, discovered a new relative in one whose acquaintance he had already formed, and found himself heir to an amount which would render him independent for life. The residue of the Ackland property, was, by the same will, conveyed to the legal heirs of the testator's elder brother John—of whom, after the death of the Duprees, Villeta Linden remained the only living representative. And the portion which fell to her, was more than double the amount which had been given to her friends.

But neither of the parties came into possession of their respective fortunes without experiencing in some degree the wearisomeness of the "law's delay;" and in the meantime Villeta made her home with Grace, who, from the night of her rescue, insisted upon her right to retain her henceforth as a member of her family.

"I will take no denial, dear sister," she said, throwing her arms affectionately about the neck of Villeta, and kissing her fondly. "I love you, and must have you with me. We are both orphans, and we will henceforth be sisters in act as well as in name."

And Villeta, with tearful eyes, accepted the offer of the noble girl, and found in Grace a sister, and in her mansion a home. And as time assuaged her grief, and the excitement connected with the terrible events which we have recorded died away, the bloom of health and happiness returned to cheeks which had long been pale with sorrow, and the light of joy danced in those orbs of blue which had so often been filled with tears of wretchedness and woe.

And never was the bloom on those lovely cheeks deeper, or the light in those blue eyes softer, or the joy in that loving heart purer, than when the manly form of the noble artist was by her side, and his clear, musical voice was sounding in her ear, speaking his love of nature and of art, of poetry and of music, and of all things bright, and pure, and holy, and beautiful. And almost daily they met in the sweet communion of harmonic love, and time flew by on golden wings. They walked and talked, and thought and dreamed; and, happy in the present, they saw the angel Hope unroll the scroll of the future, and heard her whisper that their united destinies were traced in lines of light, and that henceforth the scenes of their earthly pilgrimage would be as bright and glorious as those of the past had been dark and gloomy.

One glorious autumnal night, when the bright, silver moon rode high in the clear, blue heavens, and a soft breeze brought southern airs to kiss the leaves and sleeping flowers, Julian and Villeta took a stroll through the garden, leaving Herbert and Grace *tête-à-tête* in the splendid drawing-room. An hour later, and the lovers were seated in a beautiful vine-clad arbor, and the hand of the lovely maiden was resting tremu-

iously in the hand of her noble companion, while her soft blue eyes were bent upon the ground, and her lovely features had the warm flush of Aurora when she springs up the eastern slope to herald to the delighted world the coming of him who is her life.

Julian was speaking—speaking gently, tenderly, in a low, earnest, musical tone; and his large dreamy eyes were fixed with a look of love upon the lovely being who was tremulously listening to words that fell upon her spirit as the dew falls upon the flower, to give it fresher life and brighter bloom.

The voice ceased—there was a deep silence for a few moments—and then, in even a lower and more musical tone, Julian resumed :

“ And now, dear Villeta—dear to me beyond anything earthly—you have heard me through ; you have heard me acknowledge a love as undying as all that is born of Heaven ; and it only remains for you, by a single word, to make me the happiest of living beings. Say, sweet one, will you be mine—forever—here and hereafter ?”

Villeta trembled violently, but did not speak ; and stealing his arm around her graceful form, Julian gently drew her closer to his side—closer to his heart—till at length her blushing features were hid upon his manly breast, and tears of happiness were flowing from her still averted eyes.

“ I am answered,” murmured Julian : “ you are mine, sweet angel—ever, ever, forever mine ;” and as he spoke, he bent down fondly, drew back her golden hair from her roseate cheeks, and sealed his joy upon her ruby lips with a kiss of undying love.

At this moment the happy lovers were startled by the merry voice of Grace.

"Hollo, fond travelers through labyrinthine walks, and under shady trees and vine-draped bowers, beneath Luna's silver light—what ho!" she cried, as she came hurrying up to the now confused lovers, half dragging the timid and abashed Herbert by the arm. "What hears the melancholy moan to-night, that might not have been spoken by the soft light of an astral lamp?" she continued, with a merry laugh. "Ah! see, Herbert, see, into what terrible confusion we have thrown the shrinking pair! Upon my soul, I do believe there has been declaration number two! We were number one, you know; and sentiment is catching as well as the cholera."

"Grace! Grace!" cried Herbert, in painful confusion.

"Ah! you may well say *grace*, after what else you have said," pursued the brilliant and witty heiress. "Would you believe it, dear sister Villeta! this man of law has actually had the assurance to propose to take this same mad-cap me for better or for worse! What! running away, both of you, at this happy announcement!" she continued, with a ringing laugh, as Villeta disappeared in one direction and Herbert in another. "Come, Julian, we are conquerors—the field is ours—so pray fall into line, and let us march back in triumph, to the tune of 'Hail Columbia.'"

The following winter witnessed two brilliant weddings at the De Vere Mansion, and Herbert and Grace, and Julian and Villeta, were joined in the sacred bonds of marriage. Mr. Vincent was present with his family, and no one looked more proud and happy than he; and Miss Pierson, notwithstanding the result had

proved her no prophetess, was among the first to wish her niece and her noble partner a long life of happiness.

Notwithstanding his change of fortune, Herbert, through choice, pursued his profession, and gradually rose to the legal eminence of judge of one of the superior courts, which position he still holds, with the confidence and esteem of all who know him. Grace adores him; and, surrounded by a blooming family, is as gay and brilliant as ever, though somewhat less wild, and is as happy as heart can desire.

Julian and his lovely wife sailed for England during the spring ensuing their marriage, and, after obtaining possession of their Ackland fortunes, made the tour of the Continent. His love of art induced him to return to his noble profession, and a few years since he was known in Florence as the great American Artist. At present he resides in Philadelphia, and is happy in the sweet companionship of his still lovely wife and blooming daughter Grace.

Mrs. Morley was not forgotten. This poor woman had performed many a kindly act for Villeta and her suffering brother, when friends were few; and the lovely orphan was not one to forget a kindness. In a delicate manner, Villeta bestowed upon her a sum which placed her above the miseries of want; and the remainder of her days were passed in comparative ease, blessing her lovely and noble benefactress.

Marie was tried for the murder of Madame Chevenecau; but she had the earnest sympathy of every feeling heart, and was acquitted on the plea of insanity. For a short time after her trial, she was confined in the Insane Asylum, and then set at liberty. During

all her troubles and trials, Grace and Villeta proved themselves her affectionate friends; but Mrs. Leslie stood by her as a mother by her child. After her release from confinement, Mrs. Leslie insisted upon her making her home with her, and sharing her fortune; and subsequently they removed to a neighboring city, where they still reside, with Catharine Frankstein for a housekeeper. They spend much of their time and means in going about among the poor and distressed, speaking kind words and giving alms; and among this class of her fellow beings, Marie Souloni is known to-day as — *The beautiful lady in black who never smiles.*

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